

Ransom!

ARTHUR SOMERS
ROCHE



FROM
MACKENZIE
THE PEOPLE'S DRUGGIST
DRUGS AND STATIONERY
PHONE 40 MILTON, ONT.



u4q✓

RANSOM!

BY

ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE

AUTHOR OF "LOOT," ETC.

SINCE THIS BOOK IS
NO LONGER IN DEMAND
TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY
IS OFFERING IT FOR SALE


McCLELLAND, GOODCHILD & STEWART
PUBLISHERS :: :: :: TORONTO

**COPYRIGHT, 1918,
BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY**

**COPYRIGHT, 1916-17,
BY THE STORY-PRESS CORPORATION**

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO
ETHEL PETTIT ROCHE



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from
University of Toronto

<https://archive.org/details/ransome00roch>

RANSOM!

By ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE

Author of LOOT, etc.

THE "Readjustment Society of the World" had large and ambitious designs. In fact, it set on foot one of the most amazing and impudent plots to control the wealth of the world ever conceived.

The plot was remarkably simple; the agents of the Society of a type unknown to criminal records.

The hero, an idle young man about town, in striving to recover his fortune, which has strangely vanished, stumbles upon an astonishing clue and—

A girl with both courage and brains, and a delightfully eccentric old Wall Street magnate, aid him in unravelling the mystery.

The surprises come thick and fast—the suspense holds up to the very last page.

RANSOM!

CHAPTER ONE

WARING was bored. The pretty dancer who had, without so much as a by-your-leave, dropped into the chair opposite him, yawned flagrantly in his face.

“M’sieur should have brought his breviary,” she said.

“Eh?” Waring started; his eyes twinkled, and he smiled at the dancer. “Mademoiselle will honour me by drinking another glass of wine?”

The little dancer arose from her chair; she shook her scant skirt about her trim legs.

“Zut! M’sieur is as entertaining as a saint’s confession!” She shrugged her bare shoulders; a man at the next table eyed her, and she smiled provocatively; Waring watched

them glide off together, unresentful at the impertinent *moue* she made at him over her new-found partner's shoulder. Then he forgot all about her.

He sipped his wine, looking about him with vague eyes. It was the usual sort of thing in this sort of place. The same sort of thing that might be found in any of a dozen Montmartre cafés at this hour—midnight. Officers home on leave, bright-eyed Parisiennes, a sprinkling of Russians, English and Americans. It was quieter than before the Great War, and there was less extravagance. The fact that the French were not spending their money on such entertainment as this might perhaps be one reason why Waring had attracted the attentions of the little dancer.

Waring wished that he had stayed at his hotel and got a good night's rest against tomorrow's railway journey to Cherbourg. For at least the dozenth time he cursed the breakdown of the Paris express—from the Riviera—that had made him miss connections for Liverpool and the White Star liner that sailed to-morrow morning. Even though it didn't matter that the liner sailing from Cherbourg

to-morrow afternoon would land him in New York two days later than his planned sailing, even though by rare good fortune he had secured at the booking-office this afternoon excellent accommodations on the French liner, he was irritated.

He had wanted to sail on a White Star liner; he had wanted to land in New York seven days from now. It was a nuisance that one couldn't do exactly as one wanted. He had not intended to spend a night in Paris; he resented savagely the railway accident that interfered with his intentions.

The little dancer who had so frankly forced her acquaintance upon him and as frankly left him, circled, with her more complaisant friend, close to Waring's table. She lifted one shoulder in affected fright at him. Waring knew that he had been scowling, and at the girl's mockery he grinned infectiously. The dancer felt sorry that she had so early decided that Waring was uninteresting; the grin justified her first opinion: that blue-eyed, red-haired men are by no means dull.

But Waring's grin disappeared quickly. It was a tiresome world, and Paris was not the

least tiresome of the places in it. There had been a time, six or eight years ago, when Waring had loved Paris. Well, he loved the city now, but he didn't wish it forced upon him. Paris was like a rare and heady vintage: one must be exactly in the right mood to appreciate it, to desire it.

And Waring was not in the right mood. He wished that he were; Paris, when one felt right, was so gay. But to-night all the gayety seemed artificial, forced. This was the fourth cabaret he'd been in since leaving the hotel. . . . He wondered if he were growing old. Thirty-one! Where did middle age begin, anyway? Had he lost his capacity for enjoyment? What meant all this late restlessness?

He caught his waitress' eye. "*L'addition*," he said.

He paid his check, tipped the waitress and rose from his chair. He faced the entrance and stood, half-straddling his chair, for a moment. Then he sank back into it.

"Bring me coffee—with cognac," he told the waitress.

With a shrug of her shoulders—but incom-

prehensible, these Americans were!—the waitress departed to fulfil the order.

A moment ago Waring had wondered if he were growing old. Now he knew that he was not—at least not so old but that the sight of a pretty girl stirred his pulses. And she *was* pretty, this girl who had just entered the café. More, she was lovely! The long coat that half-veiled the outlines of her figure could not disguise the supple, delicious youth of her; and beneath the jaunty felt hat tendrils of brown hair, shot with gold, peeped tantalisingly out. Her eyes were dark, but Waring could not tell their exact colour. Her face was oval, with a short, straight nose, perhaps the least bit tilted, with an adorable chin and a sweetly curving mouth. A lovely face, and despite its intense femininity a strong face. And mischievous, too! There was the promise of raillery in those dimples.

Waring was frankly entranced—and bewildered! So evidently a lady, what on earth was she doing, alone, in a Montmartre restaurant at midnight? It needed no second glance to tell him that she belonged to a class far remote from that of the pretty dancer who had

so vainly tried to intrigue him. Waring had not knocked around the world thirty-one years without learning to tell, at a glance, the demi-mondaine. But this girl—

She sat down at a table near him; he heard her order: lithia water. He noted the colour in her cheeks, and now that she was closer, the sparkle in her eyes. They were not so dark as he had thought; the long lashes had created that effect; they were hazel.

Waring found himself looking right into those eyes, with a queer impression similar to that which he had often experienced when staring over the side of a small boat into deep water—one pierces a shadow and thinks that the secrets of the deep are solved, when one discovers that it is another shadow one sees: mystery lurks beyond.

Then he noticed that her colour had risen, and he himself flushed. He had been rude, though unintentionally. He half-lifted his hand to signal the waitress; then he dropped it to the table. Without the slightest flirtatious intention, he did not propose to leave the café just yet.

From the tables about him sounded hand-

clapping. Waring looked toward the low stage at one end of the room. Upon it had just appeared a couple, shabbily attired. They began to dance. It was the usual Apache dance. The woman was slim, graceful, clever. But the man—degrading as Waring thought the dance to be, he yet was forced to involuntary admiration of the man.

A little above the average height,—he would scale within an inch of Waring's five-feet-eleven,—well-built, the man was not only a graceful dancer but was a wonderful actor. He threw himself into the spirit of the dance; he was pantherish, savage, ruthless, barbaric—Waring could not help himself; he found himself applauding.

He ceased clapping his hands as he looked at the girl at the near table. Had he been in any doubt as to her being in a place where she distinctly did not belong, that doubt would have dissolved now. For there was disgust on her face, her face that had been white and that suddenly became crimson. Waring was ashamed that he had applauded. He felt suddenly angry with the young girl. What right had she to come to such a place as this and

witness this dance that glorified the baser, animal passions? She ought to be spanked! Serve her jolly well right to blush, to be mortified! If he were her brother, he'd give her a tongue-lashing that—

He ceased wondering just what his fraternal words would be. The dancers had left the stage. A man at a front table had smiled at the danseuse; she had sat down with him. The male dancer was swaggering among the tables, bowing to acquaintances who hailed him as "Raoul the Red."

His red hair, of course! That was the origin of the nickname. Waring conceived a violent dislike for the dancer. Red-haired men ought to be in better business than dancing. He felt that having red hair himself somehow de-classed him.

Then his violent dislike became cold anger. The dancer, bowing, nodding, had reached the table where sat the recently arrived girl. He smirked at her; he twirled the faint indications of a moustache. Waring saw the girl shrink in her chair. The dancer spoke to her and sat down beside her; the girl's eyes appealed

to Waring. And Waring walked over to her table.

"Mademoiselle is annoyed?" he asked.

He was conscious of a dead silence about him; the orchestra, which had been playing an American rag-time tune, grew still. The dancer leaped to his feet.

"M'sieur intrudes," he stated.

Waring eyed the man coldly. He turned to the girl again.

"Mademoiselle is annoyed?" he asked again.

To his surprise she replied in English.

"Please," she said, "take me out of here."

Waring placed a five-franc piece on the table. "For the waitress," he said.

The dancer picked up the coin—flipped it in the air, caught it, dropped it on the table.

"M'sieur purchases his pleasures cheaply," he said.

His strong white teeth gleamed as he leered. Waring aimed for the exact centre of the smile; he had a large, capable fist and a boxer's eye. The dancer went down with a crash. It was Waring's left hand that had struck him. Waring's right reached for his coat and hat, on a chair by his own table. He got only

the hat. A glance at the angry faces about told him that he had done more than strike a nauseous male flirt; he had struck a favourite of the cabaret, a favourite with many friends.

One's skin is more valuable than one's coat. Moreover, there was the girl. Waring seized her by one arm. Rapidly he propelled her to the door. The blow he had just struck "Raoul the Red" awed those in his path. They were content to curse him and afraid to molest him. But behind him—Waring glanced over his shoulder as they reached the door. The dancer was being assisted to his feet; his mouth streamed blood, oaths and threats. He reeled after Waring and the girl, urged on by the cries of his outraged admirers. Waring wondered whether to send the girl on by herself and stand and meet the rush, or continue with her. Which was better for her? Paris, at night, was—as had just been proved—no place for an unescorted young girl. He saw the little dancer who had tried to flirt with him climb upon a chair by the stage; the restaurant was suddenly dark. He did not know that "Raoul the Red" had repulsed the little dancer's affection and that she gloried in the

blow that Waring had dealt him. He only knew that there was confusion in the darkness behind him, and that a cabby who might have parleyed with an unescorted girl, delaying her to find out if there might be more in hindrance than in aid of her escape, whipped up his nag the moment they had climbed inside his carriage.

A nasty mess! Why on earth hadn't he controlled himself? A disgraceful café brawl that might have led to heaven knew what! But they were out of it, and now that they were safe, that no harm had come to the girl, Waring rejoiced in his skinned knuckles. He had taught one ruffian that a lady may not be insulted with impunity.

The girl was huddled in one corner of the carriage. Waring could hear muffled sobs. The heat of the fight left him as suddenly as it had come; he remembered now how appealing and frightened had been her eyes, how lovely, even in her alarm, she had been. A queer chokiness that had possessed him when he first glimpsed her possessed him again.

"You musn't cry about it," he said. "It's all over. Where do you wish me to take you?"

She named a hotel—a very fashionable and expensive hotel. Waring called the address to the cabby.

“I’d better ride along with you—if you don’t mind,” he said.

“Th-thank you,” she replied. She said no more.

Sulkiness came to Waring. Of course, he didn’t expect her to fall on his neck, but after all—he sat up very stiffly in the carriage, looking straight ahead.

More sounds came from the huddled figure beside him. He looked at her suspiciously. Of course, women often got hysteria after scenes like the one they had just passed through, but—this sounded like healthy giggling.

“I don’t see anything funny,” he said.

“You didn’t see yourself—in the light we just passed,” she answered. “You look so stern and—and—was that a left hook or a jab that you knocked that man down with?”

“You’re American,” charged Waring.

“Of course. And I read the sporting pages—when the sisters let me see a New York paper. You’re American too.”

“How’d you know?” demanded Waring.

“Would a Frenchman—or even an Englishman—have interfered and helped me? No indeed, Mr. Waring.”

“Eh?” He was genuinely surprised. “How’d you know my name?”

“I read the society pages too, and look at the pictures—when the sisters let me.”

“What sisters? Where are they to-night? How’d they let you out alone? What were you doing in that café? Don’t you know any better? If I were your brother, I’d——”

“Yes, what would you do, Mr. Waring?”

Waring blushed. He remembered the punishment that he had thought suitable for her a little while ago.

“Well, I’d talk to you,” he said feebly.

“How dreadful!” she exclaimed.

Ill-humour never held Waring very long. It was briefer than ever now. Though he could not distinguish her face in the gloom of the cab, he had not forgotten how lovely it was. He laughed; and his laugh was as likable as his grin. Yet he tried to be stern.

“What were your people up to, to let you out alone, anyway? And how’d you happen to go to that restaurant, and how——”

“Well,” she said defiantly, “suppose you’d been in a French convent since you were five years old, and spent your vacations there too, except sometimes when girls invited you to their homes? Suppose you’d never been in Paris in your *life*? Suppose that your uncle, who was your guardian, had telegraphed the sisters to send you to Paris, and that when you got there your uncle was terribly busy and didn’t have any time to take you anywhere, and spent all his evenings out? Suppose all that! Wouldn’t *you* be bored and want to go out and see Paris, and finally wouldn’t you go ahead and do it?”

“There’s merit in your contentions,” he said. “But—don’t you know that it isn’t safe?”

“I do now,” she said, “but—I’m glad!”

“Well, so am I!” he laughed. “And perhaps your uncle won’t mind my showing you the shops and the Bois and——”

“But we haven’t been properly introduced,” she said with a mocking primness.

“Oh,” he said blankly. “But I can call on your uncle and explain, and——”

“Have him discover that I was out to-night? Indeed, no, Mr. Waring.”

Waring pursed his lips. “Well, I have an acquaintance that’s fairly wide in Paris. Suppose you tell me your uncle’s name—and your own—and I’ll see——”

“Do you really want to see me again?” she asked.

In any other woman, almost, Waring would have decided that the question was flirtatious. But somehow there was in this girl’s tones a boyish frankness different from anything he had ever experienced. He answered her honestly.

“Indeed I do!”

“Then my uncle’s name is Randall—Peter Randall.”

“And your own?”

She laughed. “Oh, it’ll be much more fun if you don’t know my name, if when you come to call, we really *are* introduced and it isn’t a make-believe.”

“Oh, I say!” he protested.

But the carriage stopped before her hotel.

“I’ll just get out; don’t you,” she said. “It would look——”

“Very well,” said Waring.

He leaned across to open the door on her side. His hand brushed hers. She gripped his hand with firm fingers.

“You are just as nice and brave as you can be, Mr. Waring, and—I’m ever so much obliged.”

Then she was gone. Waring laughed tenderly to himself, as the cabby drove him to his hotel. “Ever so much obliged!” Like a boy! In his room, undressed, he bathed his bruised knuckles with witchhazel. What a delightful acquaintance! Well worth far more than bruised knuckles! He didn’t blame her a bit. Her uncle must be a hard-hearted brute! Well, if he could secure an introduction,—and it would be mighty funny if he couldn’t, with his wide circle of friends in Paris,—he would show the girl a good time. After all, he could easily cancel his booking on the French liner. There was no hurry about returning to America.

Poor little girl! All cooped up in a convent, and then denied the delights of Paris by a surly old curmudgeon of an uncle! What treats were in store for her! Mrs. Willy Sin-

sabaugh was in town, he happened to know. And he and Mrs. Willy had been pals for ever so many years. Mrs. Willy would invite the girl to things, and would chaperon them, and—he chuckled at himself, as he dropped off to sleep. He wasn't so old, after all. Thirty-one marked the real youth of a man, not the beginning of middle age. . . .

Only a very young and enthusiastic person whistles in the midst of shaving; yet Waring attempted—with very fair success—"Listen to the Mocking-bird." A mouthful of lather cut short a roulade. He frowned at himself in the glass and then grinned delightedly. What a pretty girl she was!

He finished shaving, as quickly as possible. The passing of the night had not diminished his enthusiasm. He would cancel his booking, telephone the Embassy and find out what hotel was being accorded Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh's patronage, call on her, make her do some telephoning among her friends—*some one*, the friend of a friend of a friend, perhaps, *must* know Mr. Peter Randall.

He dressed with scrupulous care, yet with

rapidity. Downstairs, in the hotel restaurant, he ordered fruit, omelette, coffee and rolls. Awaiting their arrival, he opened his *Paris Herald*. A headline struck him with almost the effect of a physical blow.

**CAREY HAIG
KILLS HIMSELF**
**Prominent New York Broker
Discovered in Defalcation
and Commits Suicide**

Waring read the brief cable from New York that followed. Then he put the paper down and mechanically ate his breakfast. But he tasted nothing. Carey Haig had been his trustee; every cent of the Waring fortune had been in his control. The cable held out little hope that there would be any salvage at all from the wreck.

Waring must go to New York at once, after all. The inchoate plans of last night and the early morning must be abandoned. The girl—Philip Waring had no right to bother with girls just now—not while he was, so far as he knew, practically a pauper. And as he

went upstairs to attend to his hasty packing, he thought little of the girl. Tragedy banished romance.

“Poor Carey,” he said, over and over again.

CHAPTER TWO

THE *Montania* had docked. Waring had come down to meet Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh and her maid; he had helped the vivacious lady through the formalities of the customs, and now the maid and several suit-cases and handbags were in one taxi, while Waring and the pretty young matron were in another.

Mrs. Willy leaned back and sighed. "There, thank heaven, that's over. Philip Waring, you're a dear, and if I weren't just mad about my husband, I'd kiss you."

"These husbands," growled Waring. "They're always in the way."

"Not to-day," said Mrs. Willy. "The brute! Running off to Chicago the night before I land! I'll make him pay!"

"But it was very important business, Madge," expostulated Waring mildly.

Mrs. Willy laughed. "Just like a man! Defend another man against a woman!"

"And if I didn't defend him?" countered Waring.

"I'd stop this taxi and make you walk," declared Mrs. Willy viciously.

"William Patterson Sinsabaugh is the pink paragon of perfection," announced Waring.

"Exactly," said Mrs. Willy, dimpling. "You are a great reader of character, Phil—though in the Carey Haig affair you weren't, were you?"

"Oh, Carey was a good fellow," said Waring evasively.

"A good fellow! When he robbed you of—Philip Waring, how can you say such a thing?"

"Well, I don't think Carey was quite himself. He—there's a lot of mystery about that matter, Madge."

"Tell me," she commanded.

He smiled at her. "If I don't, I suppose Mr. Bill Husband will, eh?"

Mrs. Willy nodded. "Mr. Bill Husband tells Mrs. William Wife *everything*."

"Well, in that case—to tell you the truth, Madge, I'm puzzled about Carey. I've been over his books. Carey killed himself on the

twenty-eighth of January. On January first all his investments, personal and trustee, were in the best of shape. He held something like four hundred thousand dollars for me; he'd been trustee during my minority, you know, and after I came of age I let him continue. It was less bother."

Waring continued:

"There was about eight hundred thousand that he held in trust for others—personal property, I mean. Well, on January seventeenth he began selling. By the twenty-fourth he had turned all his trustee investments into cash. And his own personal investments, amounting to a quarter of a million, he had sold also. He held one parcel of real estate for me—that is, collected the rent and all that sort of thing; he couldn't sell that. And there were three or four other bits of property that he didn't realise on—couldn't, I guess. Well, he killed himself on the twenty-eighth. He left a confession on his desk, stating that he had embezzled all the funds left in his care."

"But what had he done with all that cash?" demanded Mrs. Willy.

"That's the point that is so queer," said

Waring. "On the twenty-sixth he drew from various banks every cent he had, both his own and the trustee money. It came to almost a million and a half. And that money has disappeared."

"Impossible," ejaculated Mrs. Willy.

"But true," said Waring.

"But can't you tell—find out? Isn't there any way——"

"Oh, I've got detectives looking into the matter," said Waring, "but—I don't look for much."

"But didn't he leave *any* clue at *all*?"

"W-e-ll, I don't know that you could call it a *clue*, exactly. It hasn't led to much."

"What was it?"

"Why, his stenographer—she rushed into his office at the sound of the shot that killed poor Carey—says that he lived for ten seconds or so, and that he repeated over and over the name 'Bergson.'

"And in his papers I found some notes made two days before he died—made on the twenty-sixth. Not much—simply a record of having paid one Simon Bergson \$1,450,000."

"Why, almost a million and a half,"

breathed Mrs. Sinsabaugh. "And this Bergson——"

Waring forestalled her query. "Can't be located."

"But aren't there any other papers that would, maybe, tell——"

"Not a thing. Carey Haig kept fewer personal memoranda than any business man I ever heard of. But perhaps he burned them before he died. Anyway, there's nothing."

"And what are you doing?" demanded Mrs. Willy.

Waring shrugged his shoulders. "Me? Oh, I've got that piece of property that Carey couldn't sell. I'm acting as my own agent, rent-collector and that sort of thing. It brings me in about forty dollars a week."

Mrs. Willy gasped. Forty dollars sometimes paid for one of Mrs. Willy's hats.

"But you can't *live* on that, Phil! You aren't a slacker, Phil? You aren't lying down, are you? You aren't afraid to work?"

"Oh, no. Bill Husband offered me a job, but——"

"Why didn't you take it?"

Waring's voice grew bitter. "Well, Madge,

what good am I? Your husband offered me a job, but—what experience have I had? I wouldn't be worth a fourth the money he offered me, and I'd feel like a beggar taking it."

"But what *are* you doing?" persisted Mrs. Willy.

"Well, woman, if I must tell you, I'm doing my darnedest to find this Simon Bergson."

"Had any success?"

"Not a bit."

"Expect to?"

"Hope dies hard in the Warings."

Mrs. Willy eyed him speculatively. "I don't know what sort of a business man you'd make, Phil. But I do know one thing about you."

"I entreat you, Mrs. William Wife of old Bill Husband—tell me what you know about me."

"You'd make a dandy husband, Phil."

"Eh?" He grinned his infectious grin. "You aren't thinking—Madge, it isn't possible that you're going to turn Bill Husband loose and——"

"Philip Waring, you're—you're *immoral*! I—maybe I won't introduce you to her, now."

Waring put his hands up over his head. "Help!" he groaned. "I thought that being a pauper would protect me from——"

"Well, it won't," declared Mrs. Willy decisively. "And your being poor—well, my Bill Husband lost every penny in the panic seven years ago, and look at the old dear now. And *he* didn't have any business experience or—or anything."

"No, not a thing in the world except a wife who came to him and offered him the hundred thousand that her father had left her."

Mrs. Willy coloured. "Well, he didn't take it."

"And you expect me to take from some woman——"

"Oh, you go ahead too fast," said Mrs. Willy. "She—well, Bill Husband will find something else for you, and this girl—Phil, she's a beauty, and her uncle is immensely rich,—every one says so, anyway,—and she's his only heir—or should I say heiress? Anyway, you're going to meet her—to-morrow night, if I can locate her so soon. She's stopping at the Plutonia, I believe, and—I'll bet you'll discover this Bergson person and get your

money back, and—I'm home at last! Oh, Phil, look at old John smile at me. I'm a bad wife and housekeeper, running off for three months at a time."

She waved at the grizzled butler standing on the steps. Then she was out of the taxi and at home. Waring, after conditionally promising to dine with the Sinsabaughs the following night—if Sinsabaugh should return from Chicago in the morning—and further assuring Mrs. Willy that he knew her judgment of feminine charms was perfect and that he felt certain that he would fall madly in love with Miss Sorel as soon as he saw her, dismissed the taxi and walked downtown toward his bachelor quarters in Twenty-eighth Street.

He smiled as he walked. Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh was a dear. Just now she was reproaching herself for having been away from home for three months, but within another couple of weeks she'd be restless and off she'd go again. He remembered what he'd heard her husband say, to a group of chaffing intimates, at the club one day:

"It's all very well for you people to say that I'm no better than a bachelor, with my

wife trotting off to Europe or California or some other place," Sinsabaugh had laughed. "*But*—the average man has one honeymoon in all his life. I've been married nine years, and I've had at least three honeymoons a year in the last seven. I *have* to stick on the job here, but that's no reason why she shouldn't have a good time."

It might not have worked well with some people; some men would have objected to the butterfly tendencies of Mrs. Willy, but Waring didn't know where a happier couple than the Sinsabaughs could have been found.

His smile broadened—then grew tenderly reminiscent as he thought of Mrs. Willy's undisguised matchmaking plans for himself. Dear lady! She never grew discouraged, never realised the hopelessness of her task. For if Waring ever married any one, it would be that girl whom he had rescued from the attentions of the dancer in the Montmartre restaurant, and she—well, nobody that he knew, knew of Peter Randall, and so—well, he'd never see her again. And it was best. At thirty-one, untrained to business, the only chance a man without capital has is of being

a salaried employee. *With* capital—but not a woman's! If he could recover the money embezzled by Carey Haig and—oh, well, what was the use! Spilled milk!

At the Waldorf, he stopped in for a cocktail. It was while drinking it slowly that he became conscious that he was being followed. He looked about him, with seeming carelessness but with eyes that took in everything. Yet he could see no one who seemed at all out of place here, no one whose manner was furtive or slinking.

Waring paid his check at the desk and walked out into Thirty-fourth Street. He tried to shake off the sensation that had made him scrutinise the faces about him at the bar, but it would not be shaken off.

Once, in Uganda, a panther had trailed Waring when he was separated from his native attendants. Something instinctive, surviving over the centuries from the days of ancestral barbarism, had warned Waring to be on his guard then. It had not been a matter of scent or hearing or seeing. It had been something beyond any of the five senses that had saved his life in the Uganda jungle. And

that same supersense now told him plainly that he was being followed.

He turned toward the Avenue and walked south, continuing on his way to his apartment. Why should any one follow him? If the mysterious Bergson, who had obtained Waring's fortune from the defaulting, self-slain Carey Haig, knew of Waring's feeble efforts to locate him, he would also know Waring's address. He would not bother to trace him there, when the telephone-book or ordinary directory would furnish the required information.

He was enmeshed in none of what the French euphemistically term *affaires*. Waring was no saint, but he was clean. No jealous husband, seeking divorce evidence. . . . There was a nasty weekly in town that made a practice of printing innuendo, but even if the reporter of that unclean sheet had seen him escorting Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh home—ridiculous! The reporter would know Philip Waring by sight or he wouldn't hold his job overnight. This was not conceit; the Warings had been prominent socially in Manhattan since the days

of old Jan Worringe, the founder of the family in New York.

Then, inasmuch as there was no reason for any one's following, no one could be following. So Waring tried to believe as he turned the corner into Twenty-eighth Street. Nevertheless the feeling persisted, and as he entered his ground-floor apartment, he glanced rapidly over his shoulder. No one was in sight. Still, when he stepped across the threshold and closed the door behind him, he did not lock it. Instead, he stood close to it, his ear to the crack.

It was an old-fashioned apartment-house, only four stories tall, devoted, for the most part, to artists and writers. There was no elevator. And as it was a warm spring day, the door leading from the vestibule into the hall was swung wide. As he listened, Waring heard the sound of feet on the marble flagging of the vestibule.

The steps ceased. Waring opened his door the least bit and glanced through. Some one was bending over, staring at the name-cards above the letter-boxes. There was something vaguely familiar about the man—also some-

thing strange: his apparel, which was French in cut. Waring now recollected what had not struck him as important when drinking his cocktail: that as he looked up, a man dressed somewhat oddly for New York had sauntered to the free-lunch table, his back to Waring.

Well, if the man *had* been following him, it was a simple matter to accost him and ask his reasons. Waring stepped through the door, very softly, and was in the vestibule before the man looked up. And Waring recognised him at once. It was the dancer, "Raoul the Red," whom he had thrashed last January in the café in Montmartre.

There was no time to ask questions. As Waring looked, the man sprang. There was a struggle of a moment; the knife that had flashed in the dancer's hand dropped to the floor as Waring's grip crushed his wrist. Agile, slippery, the man broke from Waring's grasp and burst through the open outside door into the street. Waring dashed after him. A touring-car was rolling rapidly down the street. Waring stopped; his anger evaporated in pity; he cried aloud, but it was too late. Heedless of everything save the man pursuing

him, Raoul the Red had not seen the oncoming machine. Its front wheels knocked him down, hurled him against the curbstone.

The car stopped at once; the chauffeur—its only occupant—ran back to where Waring knelt over the dancer's body.

"It wasn't my fault, boss," stammered the man. "Y-you saw him; you——"

"I live right in this house here; name's Philip Waring. If there's any trouble about it, I'll clear you. Never mind about that, now. Take him to the nearest hospital."

"Is he dead, d'ye think?" asked the driver.

"God knows; he looks it. Hurry."

"D'ye know him, boss? It looked like he was running from you."

"I don't know him. He was in the hall, and I frightened him."

"Thief, eh? Help me in with him."

Together they deposited the limp form of Raoul the Red in the tonneau of the car. A few persons had been attracted by the accident, but so swiftly had the body been placed in the car that no policeman had as yet appeared on the scene. But one would come later, very soon, Waring reasoned. And if he told that

the man had drawn a knife on him, had followed him here—well, Waring would have to tell the incident of some months ago, in the Paris restaurant.

And Waring had figured notoriously enough in the newspapers this winter. It had hurt a bit to read editorials, after Carey Haig's death, when it had been discovered that Waring's fortune had been lost, commenting on the difference between other Warings, who had *made* their fortunes, and himself, characterised as an idler who had not even taken ordinary precautions about his affairs but had let another man do the onerous work of collecting dividends and clipping coupons.

And now, if Waring told what had really happened— He wouldn't do it! Only last Sunday he had appeared in a newspaper-yarn that pretended to tell the habits and recreations of, and a lot of other nonsense about New York's "eligible society bachelors." God forbid that he should invite notoriety! He could tell the police what he had told the chauffeur. And a potential murderer was done no injustice when he was characterised as a sneak-thief.

He walked swiftly into the house to avoid

the stares of the curious. Thank heaven, no one could possibly have seen the struggle, and Waring's clothing had not become more disarrayed than assisting the chauffeur lift the victim of the accident might easily have accounted for.

The gleam of steel on the vestibule floor made him pick up the knife, a nasty little dirk, that Raoul the Red had endeavoured to use on him. And beside it lay a narrow envelope. Waring picked it up and took it with him into his apartment.

There, in his living-room, he stared at the envelope. It was without a name, but bore an address, "*Dir-sept Hancock Square, New York.*" There was no doubt but that it had fallen, during the struggle, from the coat of Raoul the Red.

One does not, dealing with gentlemen, open envelopes belonging to them. But when one deals with a murderer, one dismisses scruples. Raoul the Red, in Paris, had been patently a superior sort of Apache, who lived a life not extremely different from that which he had portrayed in his excellent dancing. What friends he might have in New York were prob-

ably the same sort of people, though they might live in quaint, old-fashioned Hancock Square, in the heart of Greenwich Village. And those friends might very well be as vindictive as the dancer, might attempt to carry out to a conclusion what the dancer had so recently attempted. With the very knife that had so nearly penetrated his own body, he slit the envelope. Another envelope was enclosed; Waring drew it forth, to stare at it in wonderment. It was addressed to Simon Bergson, 17 Hancock Square.

Simon Bergson! The man to whom poor Carey Haig had paid almost fifteen hundred thousand dollars! Waring opened the second envelope without hesitation.

CHAPTER THREE

THE enclosure was written in French. Waring read it without scruple. The following is a translation:

My dear Bergson:

The bearer of this note is one Raoul Carvajal, recently a café dancer. At present he is most earnestly sought by the police, he having inadvertently knifed a cabman with whom he had some trifling dispute. I have used him once or twice in obtaining information concerning American habitués of the cafés where he danced, and have found him trustworthy. Considering that there is an extradition treaty between America and France, and that a word from either of us will mean his arrest and execution, we need have little fear as to his fidelity.

His difficulty with the police is providential, so far as we are concerned, for he is exactly the sort of man you have been wanting. I appreciate your difficulty in obtaining men of imagination who are also men of action, of violence. This Carvajal is of a mentality above his kind, and is as ruthless as a

wolf. Further, though he has imagination, it is in subjection. I fear that I cannot recommend him as one truly interested in the Society, for he knows little about it, but promise of payment has made him an eager instrument. And if good be accomplished, it matters little that the tool be unclean. He is daring to the point of recklessness, and hates society as we do, though not, like us, because of society's injustice to the downtrodden. He hates it because he is a natural outlaw, not because he loves his fellow man. Incited by money, there is nothing at which he will stop, and such a man is necessary to you. Unfortunately, all those through whom we work cannot be inspired by the same lofty purpose that animates us. But in the matter of Burton Conybear and his associates, motives matter little; results are everything.

I am arranging to send him to New York by the *Montania*, leaving to-morrow. There will be no difficulty about the matter, as I have learned that the police believe he has fled to Italy. They will not be looking for him at Cherbourg.

I might add, as a precautionary measure, that Carvajal has red hair, light eyes of grayish-blue, and is about five feet, ten inches tall. His teeth are even and his complexion fair. I trust that he will prove as valuable as I think he will—for, although he has never been in America, he has danced in Eng-

land and speaks English with hardly a trace of accent.

I will not speak of matters connected with the Society in this letter, but shall do so in my regular weekly report. With all felicitations, I am

P. R.

Waring read the note again. Dated ten days ago, at Paris, there was no house address to identify the writer. And the writer had taken the precaution of signing only initials, which might very well be fictitious.

Nevertheless, although the sender was unknown, the man to whom it was addressed was the man whom Waring sought, and the police— He stopped, halfway across the room toward the telephone. He returned to his chair and for the third time read the note.

The "Society"? What did that mean? What did all the hints in the letter mean? And why should a Paris rough carry on his person a note in which was mentioned, with what seemed threatening meaning, the name of Burton Conybear, the richest man in America, if not the world? A slight fever of excitement throbbed in Waring's veins.

The police were stupid! Suppose he showed

them this letter? He knew exactly what would happen. The police would first make inquiries; they would not dream of arresting Simon Bergson out of hand. Beyond a note stating that payments had been made to Bergson, found in Carey Haig's effects, and the fact that his stenographer had heard the dying man gasp the same name, there was nothing against this Bergson. This letter that Waring held in his hand? That was evidence against some person named "P. R.," who lived in Paris, who had committed no offence against United States laws and was therefore not amenable to police jurisdiction in New York. It was not evidence against Bergson. Bergson couldn't help it if his Paris friend sent him a murderer to be his assistant in—

Why, Bergson could say that the letter was a jest. And the letter would not be evidence against Bergson's word. No, the police would not make an immediate arrest. Instead, a heavy-footed, and probably fat-witted, plain-clothes man would call at the Hancock Square address. He would question Bergson, ask him why Carey Haig should have paid him money. The plain-clothes man would report to police

headquarters the result of his inquiry, and then, if the police decided to arrest on general suspicion,—a very doubtful thing,—why, then Bergson would have had ample time to disappear. Anglo-Saxon law proceeds very slowly against one against whom no proof rests.

No! It was not a good idea to summon the police until one had actual, tangible evidence, sufficient to convince a jury. The facts that Raoul Carvajal bore a letter to Bergson, that Carvajal was wanted for murder in the French capital, that the dancer had even attempted to assault Waring, that Bergson had apparently received the benefit of the Carey Haig defalcations—all these things meant nothing to the police. There would have to be more than that; there would have to be proof that Bergson got money from Carey Haig.

The Greenhams? Well, that detective agency was looking into the matter for Waring now, but somehow he had felt all along that what interested the detectives was the advance payments he made them, not the prospect of success in getting back his fortune for him. Further, the Greenhams—he saw now that it was to allay his impatience—had told

him that they were in possession of a clue that made them think that the mysterious Bergson had gone to the Pacific Coast. And all the time, unless this letter that Waring held in his hand was part of some silly farce, Bergson had been in Greenwich Village.

And the letter was not farcical. The man that it recommended had so plainly shown that he was willing and anxious to play a part in tragedy!

Waring considered this angle of the affair. It was perfectly simple: Carvajal had been aboard the *Montania*; he had seen Waring with Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh and had recognised the man who had thrashed him last January. "Ruthless as a wolf" the letter said that Carvajal was. Well, the writer had written with knowledge. Undoubtedly Carvajal had forgotten all about his mission to America, his flight from the Paris police, in his savage exultation at seeing a man to whom he owed a vengeful debt. Undoubtedly Carvajal had followed Waring uptown with Mrs. Sinsabaugh; probably Carvajal had dismissed his taxicab when Waring dismissed his. Now that Waring looked back, he remembered that a

taxi had been drawn up half a block from the Sinsabaugh home. And it was not so long after leaving Mrs. Willy that he had felt that he was being followed.

Most positively the letter was not farcical! The man whom it introduced to Bergson was all that the letter said he was! But why should Bergson—or any one else, for that matter—need the services of a man like the dancer? What was this “society” that the writer mentioned? This capitalised Society? For the fourth time Waring read the letter. Written by a fanatic, yes—but by a cool-headed fanatic.

The same impulse that had stirred old Jan Worringe to leave his comfortable home in Holland, for the doubtful venture in a new world, stirred Jan Worringe’s descendant to-day. Something new; something different! Something unknown, with a spice of danger! Add to this the fact that Waring believed Simon Bergson had somehow got hold of Waring’s money, and his mood is understood.

Roughly, the description of Raoul Carvajal fitted himself. There was a difference of an inch in their heights, but that counted for

nothing: a perfectly natural mistake, that would probably not be noticed at all. And the letter would introduce him to Bergson, give him a chance to secure that evidence needful if Waring were to recover his fortune—provided, of course, that this Bergson was the Bergson Carey Haig had mentioned with his dying breath.

But Waring refused to consider the possibility that there were two Simon Bergsons in the world, both crooked. For the Bergson who had got Carey Haig's stolen money was crooked; he *must* be. And this Bergson of the letter, whose correspondent hinted casually at murder—they must be the same.

A ring at his door-bell aroused Waring from his excited thinking. He answered it; a policeman, visibly armed with nothing more alarming than a notebook, entered the apartment.

Carvajal was dead. This Waring learned from the officer's first words. And the chauffeur had been taken from the hospital to the nearest police station, there to await the result of this policeman's investigations.

"The chauffeur was blameless," said Waring. "He was proceeding at a moderate rate

of speed. It wasn't his fault. The man ran out in front of his car; he tried to stop."

"That's what the chauffeur says," agreed the officer. "But what made the man run? Was you chasing him?"

"I saw him in the hall, bending over the letter-boxes. At sight of me he began running. I naturally followed. I judge he was a thief."

"Probably was. You never seen him before, did you?"

This demanded the lie direct; Waring hesitated, but imperceptibly. It was a lie that would harm no one. It was not Waring's fault that Carvajal should have resented the just thrashing he had received last January, and so planned murder. It was the fault of the dancer. Then why should Waring suffer through Carvajal's fault?

"No, I never did," he answered.

"Well, guess it's an unmarked grave for his," said the officer. "Not a single paper on him, and not very much money. About two hundred dollars. Frenchman, he looked. French clothing, but no tailor's marks on it."

"Did he recover consciousness?" asked Waring.

The officer shook his head. "Guess he was dead when you picked him up, sir. Well, much obliged, sir. We'll turn the chauffeur loose at once."

The officer left. Waring sat down in his chair again. Perhaps he had done wrong, but—he could see no particular harm in it. Of course, it was every citizen's duty to tell the truth, but—it didn't matter at all in Carvajal's case. Whereas, if Waring did tell the whole truth of the matter, not only would he figure in the newspapers—which he detested—with the story of his fight in Montmartre shouted broadcast, but he could not pose, to the mysterious Simon Bergson, as Raoul Carvajal. And as Raoul Carvajal he had intended to pose if the dancer were merely incapacitated—had intended to take advantage of the few hours or so that must elapse before Carvajal's friends could have been notified of his injury. But now—there was no need to telephone the hospitals, to find out if Carvajal were unconscious—no need to worry about moments. Carvajal was dead.

And Waring could not find it in his heart to be regretful at the man's death. He was a

murderer—not merely a potential murderer, but an actual one, if this letter found on him told truth.

On showing the policeman out, Waring had found an afternoon paper outside his door. He opened it now. On an inside page he found the story of the *Montania's* arrival, and the list of passengers. There was a paragraph about Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh, but Waring skipped this. He searched the list of first-class passengers.

For Carvajal must have been among these. There are difficulties about the landing in America of second-class or third-class passengers who are foreigners. It was natural that Carvajal's benefactor, "P. R.," of Paris, would see to it that Carvajal travelled in the fashion that would assure least inconvenience.

And Carvajal—or again, "P. R."—would have intelligence enough to know that a man dressed in French-cut clothing would have difficulty, no matter how well he spoke English, in passing for anything but a Frenchman. Hence the dancer had been booked as a Frenchman. Waring looked for French names among the passengers.

But the *Montania* was an English boat, starting from Southampton and touching at Cherbourg. There were only two French names among the first-class passengers, though there were plenty in the second-class list. Jacques Pelletier and Pierre Carnot were these two. Americanised Frenchmen, too, for they hailed, according to the list, from Dubuque, Iowa, and Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Well, maybe one of them really hailed from one of those places, but the other was undoubtedly Carvajal. Of course! Travelling "first" and speaking English extremely well, it would facilitate landing if Carvajal posed as a naturalised American—which was probably what he had done. In view of his birth, it would not seem unnatural for him to adhere to the methods of dress of his native land.

But which? Waring, smiling,—it didn't matter much, so far as he could see,—tossed a penny. It came down "heads." Well, then, not only in the next few hours would he pretend to be Raoul Carvajal, but he would profess to have been, during the *Montania's* voyage, Jacques Pelletier, of Dubuque, Iowa.

For if Bergson had been able to get almost

a million and a half of dollars from Carey Haig, and had been able to vanish without a trace of his whereabouts until this providential accident had located him, and if Bergson were mixed up in some "society" that looked upon violence as a casual thing, it befitted Philip Waring to have a straight story. Waring only hoped that it *was* as Jacques Pelletier that Carvajal had posed. Still, it mattered little; with the letter of introduction whose description fitted himself, there was little danger of Bergson's suspecting an impersonation. And if he didn't suspect, he wouldn't make inquiries. Besides, four hundred thousand dollars was well worth risking something for! And Waring was suddenly convinced, through an emotional sort of reasoning, that he was going to recover his fortune.

Bergson had been the name of the man to whom Carey Haig had turned over the Waring fortune; Bergson had been the man whom Waring had tried, these past months, to locate; it was surely nothing less than fate that had sent Raoul Carvajal upon Waring's trail, a trail that had led the dancer to death. And if fate had interposed in the Waring affairs

so far, putting into the Waring hands a clue to the identity and whereabouts of the man who possessed the Waring fortune—well, fate simply couldn't let it go at that!

For half an hour Waring sat in the deepest thought. Fate had helped him, but fate sometimes seems to have a trick of helping those who help themselves. Perhaps, after all, fate is God.

He put himself in the place of Carvajal. Of course, the dancer himself would have explained his delay in reaching Hancock Square from the boat by saying that he had recognised an enemy and pursued him. Waring could not do this. But Waring could state that he had found his French clothing too conspicuous in this new country, and hence had bought new garments. That would account for the delay. Therefore Waring must buy new clothing.

Further, there were the two opened envelopes. It would be just as well to deliver the letter to Bergson in a sealed envelope. Waring, studying them, noticed that the handwriting on the outer one differed from that on the inner, which was exactly similar to the writing of the letter itself. Evidently Carvajal

had not wished to carry, where by some accident it might be exposed to the curious, the name and address of the man whom he had intended visiting in New York. So Carvajal had enclosed the letter in a second envelope on which he had written, probably to refresh his memory, the address merely of Bergson.

Well, in that case, all that Waring had to do was direct another envelope in his own handwriting. There was hardly a chance that Bergson knew Carvajal's writing.

Waring could explain by saying that "P. R." had given him the letter without an envelope, and had given him Bergson's address by word of mouth, but that he, Carvajal, had feared to trust his memory. The falsity of all this might later be exposed, but it takes some time for letters to pass from New York to Paris and back again. Waring might accomplish a lot in that time.

Waring directed another envelope to "17 Hancock Square." Then he looked through his wardrobe. There were clothes there that had never been worn, but somehow they did not seem to be the sort of apparel that Carvajal would have bought. They were a bit too

subdued in design for the taste of an Apache dancer of the Paris restaurants. Further, they were tailor-made, and Carvajal would not have had time to have clothing made.

Waring regretted the absence of "Mike," his servant. Mike was a Japanese who had been in Waring's employ as cook and general housekeeper for several years. But Mike, whose brain was extremely keen, and who would have died for Waring, was off for the day. And Waring could not postpone his visit to Hancock Square. Already several hours had elapsed since the *Montania* had docked.

Waring went to a desk. It was against the law for a free-born American to possess weapons in the city of New York. Nevertheless, having read of the experiences undergone by law-abiding citizens who had taken their weapons to the police to surrender them,—and had been promptly jailed,—Waring still possessed his automatic pistol, which had accompanied him to the Arctic and to Africa. He put the weapon, a flat, well-balanced affair, in the pocket of his overcoat. Then he left his apartment and started for a well-known men's

outfitting shop. When he left there, he was dressed in new clothing from the skin out.

It was quite late in the afternoon when he turned in at the low iron gate that fended a pocket-handkerchief lawn, in front of number 17 Hancock Square, from the sidewalk. He was pleasurablely excited as he walked along the red-brick path to the old-fashioned stoop, up the stoop and rang the bell. Only one thing really bothered him: what was "P. R.'s" name?

CHAPTER FOUR

THE "Society!" It had intrigued the interest of Philip Waring, but it obsessed the mind of Burton Conybear. For the dozenth time he pressed the electric call-button that summoned Henderson, his combination secretary-valet-nurse, to his presence.

This time it was not to fetch a document or rearrange the lighting or sharpen a pencil or to do any of the ordinary thousand and one things whereby Henderson earned his ample pay. It was merely to ask again a question that the testy old millionaire had asked at least four times in the last half-hour.

"The Burnham people arrived yet, Henderson?"

For any indication to the contrary that the patient Henderson's manner gave, this might have been the first time that the question had been put.

"No, sir, they'll be brought to you immediately they arrive, sir."

"All right. Be sure that they are. Er, Henderson,"—as the man started to leave the room,—“patrols on duty?”

“Why, yes, sir.”

“Gates attended to?”

Henderson bowed an affirmative.

“Men on the roof?”

“Do you think, sir, that I’d neglect——”

“Damn it, sir, who are you, the King of Kickapoodalum? D’ye think you’re ninety-nine and forty-four one-hundredths pure perfection, like a bloomin’ cake of blasted soap? Never made a mistake, I suppose? Father was a logarithm and your mother was a cosine, hey? Who’s payin’ you exactly one hundred times what you’re worth? Answer me that!”

“You are paying me one hundred dollars a week, sir,” answered Henderson, his face impassive.

“I am, am I? Well, by George, sir, I’m glad to hear you admit it! I thought maybe I was wrong, that I didn’t hire you, but that you were chief bodyguard to the Grand Vizier of the Ahkound of Swat! Well, as I ain’t wrong, is there any harm in my asking you if there are men on the roof?”

“None at all, sir. I stationed them myself, as usual, sir. I only regret that you should think me capable of forgetting the precautions that——”

Conybear’s face lost its frowning petulance.

“Didn’t think you’d neglected it. Didn’t say I did. Simply asked a civil question.” Then, as though regretting the momentary softness of his speech, he roared: “Got a right to ask, ain’t I?”

“Certainly, sir.”

“Hoomph,” snorted the old millionaire. He bent over some papers on his desk. “Big times, Henderson, big times. Big things. Got to be careful. Y’understand?”

It was as close to an apology for his rudeness as old Conybear ever came, and the valet bowed.

“Yes, sir.”

“A’right. Show the Burnham people in as soon as they come.”

“Yes, sir.” Again Henderson started for the door, and this time Conybear did not detain him, but drew a paper to him and began making notations on its margins. At first, his handwriting was shaky, but as the moments

passed, the nervousness that possessed him was conquered by his interest in his work. He was quite calm when Henderson returned to the room again.

"The Burnham gentlemen, sir," he announced.

"Show 'em in," snapped the millionaire.

Conybear locked the papers, on which he had been figuring, in a drawer of the desk and leaned back to await his visitors. They came in a moment, two men, quietly dressed, smooth-shaven, grave-faced, deferential in the presence of the lord of so many millions.

"Which one of you is Burnham?" demanded Conybear.

The older of the two men answered.

"Neither, sir," he replied apologetically. "Burnham is—a name, sir. Peter Burnham is still a heavy stockholder in the agency, and is president, but I am general manager, sir, and this gentleman, Mr. Williard, sir, is chief of operatives."

"What's your name?" demanded Conybear of the speaker.

"Meehan, sir, Robert F. Meehan."

"I didn't ask your history or what your

great-grandfather was hanged for," snapped Conybear. "Your name could be Aloysius Nero Fiddlesticks Meehan, for all I'd care! Meehan! That's enough. D'ye think I wanted to call you Robbie?"

The two men smiled faintly, and Conybear was appeased by their appreciation of his crude humour.

"Suppose you people can ferret out anything, eh?" he asked.

"We can try, sir," said Meehan.

"Read this, then," said Conybear. He shoved a letter across the desk, and Meehan took it up.

"Read it aloud," said Conybear.

Meehan bowed. He read:

" 'Burton Conybear,

" 'Sir:

" 'You have long been permitted by a complacent government to obtain fruits far beyond your deserts. You are now planning a combination of industries that will net you a hundred million dollars. Under a properly organised society, you would receive for your services in this matter not over fifty thousand dollars. You will therefore be prepared to

pay over to the undersigned ninety-nine million, nine hundred and fifty thousand dollars. As earnest of your good intention, you will make an advance payment to the undersigned of ten million dollars. You will have this amount ready on demand. You need make no effort to communicate with us, as we will know your intentions.

“ ‘Very truly yours,

“ ‘The Readjustment Society of the World.
By the Inner Council.’ ”

There was no address or date on the letter.

“Well, what d’ye make of it?” demanded Conybear.

“Is this the only letter you have received?” asked Meehan.

“Yes.”

“When did you get it?”

“Yesterday afternoon. Delivered out here.”

“Any one else seen it?”

“Henderson here.” Conybear jerked a thumb at his valet. “No one else.”

“The police?” suggested Meehan.

Conybear sneered contemptuously. “And have the newspapers learn of it, and—faugh! The people that wrote that letter aren’t the

kind to be afraid of the police. There's brains behind that note, *brains!*"

The two men from the detective agency smiled at each other. Conybear saw the smiles and growled at them.

"Yes, *brains!* Maybe you think it's an easy thing to locate the writers of that letter. All right, I hope it is easy for you. God knows I didn't send for you to miss out on it! But if you're going to tackle it as though you were dealing with a lot of Italian Black-Handers, then say so, and get the deuce out of here, now!"

"Why, no—no, Mr. Conybear," said Meehan soothingly. "But what makes you think they're so brainy?"

"Think so? I *know* it! Do they make any threats? No! That's your quiet man who means business. Bomb-throwers! Faugh! I've got men patrolling every yard of my estate; I've a private system of wiring that notifies fifty men if any one climbs the fences or goes through the gates. I've men around the house and men on the roof. Your Black-Hander—a fine chance he'd have here!"

“Then why send for us?” demanded Meehan.

“Because brains are behind this note. Trust me to recognise them! You read what the note says about a hundred million dollars—about a new combination? Gentlemen, I’ve got that scheme ready for the springing. There’s four other men in it with me, and not one of them knows what I’m definitely aiming at. I’m not tellin’ you men, either. But those men are goin’ it blind with me, because I say so. They don’t know how much there is in it for them, or for me. But the man who wrote that note knows. How does he know? Because he’s got brains. And the man that’s afraid of brains isn’t a coward; he’s just not a bloomin’ idiot.”

“One of your partners has leaked?”

“Haven’t I told you that none of them know the real inside? And not one of them knows that three others are in it with me? Each one holds the end of a string, but he doesn’t know how many other strings there are, nor where his own string leads to. How’d it get out? I’ve never mentioned it to a soul before, but I ain’t afraid you gentlemen will mention

it, nor Henderson here. But how'd it get out—unless the man that wrote that note read my thoughts? Gentlemen, I'm nervous; that's the short of it. I ain't ever been a-scared of any threatenin' letters before, and I've received a plenty of 'em. But this letter—I ask you, gentlemen, how'd whoever wrote this letter *know?*”

“Your private papers?” suggested Meehan.

“Good Lord!” cried Conybear. “I never kept no private papers of this deal!” In his nervous alarm he forgot the training of recent years and reverted to the mode of speech that had been his before enormous wealth came to him. “I kept it all in my head.”

“But if some one had overheard you talk with one of your partners and then overheard you talk with the others—couldn't your plan have been pieced together and understood by the listener?”

It was the first time Williard had spoken. Conybear glared at him.

“The walls of this room are absolutely sound-proof. How'd they hear me? Why, you—d'ye think I'm a *fool?* Maybe I

was, sending for you people!" He snorted angrily.

"Just a minute, Mr. Conybear," said Williard soothingly. "Suppose I show you how you could have been overheard?"

Conybear's jaw dropped. "Yes, suppose you do," he said.

The chief operative of the Burnham Agency flashed a look at the manager. Then he walked to a picture on the wall. He lifted it down.

"Right there," he said. "See the wires?"

"A dicto——" gasped the astonished millionaire, flashing a look of swift suspicion at his visitors.

"Right there! Right where you are, Mr. Conybear," said Meehan quietly. He sat still, his legs still crossed as they had been since he sat down, but in his hand was a revolver!

"Sound-proof walls, you know, Mr. Conybear. And the door is closed."

Conybear stared at the gun. All his nervousness had left him. Imagination, the same imagination that had made him the ruler of a country's finances, had made him fear possibilities. But concrete facts were concrete

facts—nothing more. Old Burton Conybear could look into a gun as nonchalantly to-day as he had forty years before, when he'd made his first stake by rounding up a group of train-robbers and winning the reward offered for their capture.

He looked at Henderson. "You, of course," he said, quietly. Henderson nodded, smiling sardonically.

"Always thought you were a bit too pussy-footed—stood a little too much," said the old man. "Don't suppose there's a mite of use in my keeping my foot on this electric button, is there, Henderson?"

"Not a bit," replied the valet cheerfully.

"Mind my smoking?" asked Conybear.

Williard looked at his watch. "We have a few minutes to spare before we start. Smoke, if it eases your mind."

"Thanks. Kind of you," grunted Conybear. He lighted a cigar and puffed it calmly.

"You said 'start,' didn't you?" he asked after a moment. "What's the answer?"

"Ten million now; the balance later," said Meehan.

"Suppose you think I keep little bits o' change like that on my clothes, hey?"

Meehan smiled. "Oh, no, Mr. Conybear. By 'now' I mean as a first payment—within a day or so."

"Oh, I see. Suppose you think that if I promised to make the payments, I'd be so grateful at your sparing my life that I'd be sure to keep my word, eh?"

Meehan laughed. "Oh, no! We know that you'd break your word in such a matter without a qualm."

"Well, you got good sense, like I said the people behind that note had. But you know that a bank is going to hold up a check for anything like ten million, don't you? Ain't going to deliver it over to strangers? You know that mighty well."

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it, sir," said Meehan.

"Yes, and maybe the train that'll take you to prison will cross some bridges, too."

"Well, we won't bother to look up the timetable for that train right now, Mr. Conybear. Ready?"

"For what?"

"A little journey."

"You don't suppose I'm going anywhere with you, do you? You people have caught the elephant, all right, but what you going to do with him? Oh, I'll write checks for the rest of the night. But you got intelligence; you know they'll be stopped. And if you killed me, the checks would be stopped. Looks to me like the elephant's got you."

"I mentioned a little journey," said Meehan.

"That's right; you did. Well—say, why the note and all that? Why didn't Henderson—and I hope to the Lord that some day I get you at the end of a gun, you sweet-scented turncoat! Why didn't Henderson just bat me over the head with a blackjack and lug me off?"

"Through your guards? You said we had brains, awhile back, Mr. Conybear. The note was so that you'd send to a detective agency and strangers could be admitted to you."

"How'd you know I'd send to Burnham's?"

Meehan laughed. "Inasmuch as Henderson has been mailing your letters, did it matter to whom you applied for aid?"

“Brains is right,” said Conybear ruefully. “No use in my suggesting that I never bear any ill-will toward those who beat me, provided I think I could use ’em in my business, eh?”

“We aren’t thieves or blackmailers, Mr. Conybear,” replied Meehan. “We represent the Society. Will you come, now?”

Old Conybear stared at the weapon reposing on Meehan’s knee. He shrugged his shoulders. “I hate to breathe the same air with Henderson. You two people—well, this is business with you. Poor business, fool business, for I’ll live to see you jailed, but—business. But Henderson—he’s eaten my bread, taken my wages——”

“Henderson remains here—to explain your absence,” said Meehan.

Conybear stared at Meehan. Then he looked at Henderson.

“I take a little of it back—what was in my thoughts, Henderson,” he said. “You’re a polecat, but you got nerve. . . . Well, here’s to the day you hang, Henderson! Where to, gentlemen?”

He was as brisk and alert as though, hun-

gry from a hard forenoon's work, he were about to lunch with two cronies. He looked from one to the other of the two "Burnham" men.

"I might suggest to you, Mr. Conybear," said Williard, "that although we work in the interests of society,—the true interests of the true society, as against the interests of men like yourself and the society that tolerates you,—we realise that the world misunderstands men like ourselves. We have to pass many of your servants, of your private guards. We are perfectly willing to die, if need be, Mr. Conybear. I do not ask any promise from you to keep silent. Nor do I like to make threats."

"Why not? People understand threats. Only thing they do understand. If I get a chance, in the next ten minutes, or the next ten years, to put you gentlemen in prison or in your graves, I'll do it. But I've got a lot of things to do in this world. I don't intend to die any sooner than I've got to."

"You have the right idea, Mr. Conybear; I only hope that you will continue in the belief that we have brains and quick wits. The

least word—but you are a man of intelligence, even though your intelligence has been perverted, Mr. Conybear. You are going on a sudden trip. You do not know when you will return. That is all you need to say. A word more than that—we understand exactly what we are doing, Mr. Conybear. We know how every stranger, no matter how he is vouched for, is scrutinised by your guards. We realise the risk we are running. We only hope that you realise the equal risk you run.”

“No one’s ever accused Burton Conybear of bein’ an out-and-out tom-fool,” said the old man quietly.

“Very well. Henderson, you come to the car with us,” said Williard.

CHAPTER FIVE

HERKOMER, Commissioner of Police, yawned over his evening paper. It was incredible, the virtue of New York! Beyond a few petty breaks, the routine of gathering in criminals "wanted" in other cities, the restraining of the drunk and disorderly, the town was as dull as a United States Senator making a speech against women's suffrage.

Not a major crime of any sort in seven days! Truly, the millennium was here! Not a line in the paper abusing his administration of the department, no letters from indignant citizens criticising the traffic arrangements. . . . He turned idly to the financial page. A headline caught his eye

Herkomer carelessly read the half-column story that followed. Condensed, it was to the effect that certain bear interests had taken advantage of the Amalgamated General Products Company's failure to pass a dividend yesterday by circulating reports that the com-

pany was facing a receivership. If true, such a condition would affect the markets of the whole world, and there was a lively time for twenty minutes, the whole list of stocks tumbling an average of two points. The huge trust immediately issued a statement, declaring that the reason for the failure of the directors to pass the usual quarterly dividend was that it had been impossible, owing to various matters, to get a quorum of the directors together. The directors' meeting had been postponed a week, at the end of which time a dividend would be passed. All statements intimating that the company's finances were in disorder were canards. The company would use every means to trace these canards to their source and confidently expected that the governors of the Stock Exchange would take measures to prevent their repetition.

Herkomer chuckled. "But if the directors *did* refuse to declare a dividend, would they tell the public in advance of their intentions, or would they quietly sell, all along the line, first? It's wicked to spread a report that Bill Smith is a crook, but it's all right for Bill to *be* a crook! It's a funny world, the humour

of it depending on whether you're a little fellow or a big fellow."

He turned over the paper to his favourite cartoonist, and was chuckling when there came a knock on his door. Sergeant Kelcey entered in response to his call.

"Another nut, sir. If he don't see you, we'll wake up some mornin' to find the Woolworth Buildin' in the East River."

Herkomer smiled wearily. "Is that what he says?"

Sergeant Kelcey shook his head. "No, he won't say anythin', sir, except that he's got to see you, and knowin' your rulin', sir——"

Once, a year or so ago, an alleged crank had been ejected from police headquarters without being permitted to see Herkomer. The crank had gone directly to a newspaper office, and the newspaper had received the glory of bringing a dangerous criminal to justice, through the crank's information. Also, Herkomer had received his first and last rebuke from the Mayor. Thereafter all persons wishing to see the Commissioner on matters connected with the enforcing of justice found more or less easy access to him. Of

course, if they would divulge their information to a subordinate, so much the better, but when they would not, Herkomer saw them.

"Bring him in," he ordered.

Kelcey saluted and left the office. He returned in a moment, like a battleship—Kelcey stood six-feet-three in his stockings—convoying a submarine.

The clothes of the undersized man whose frightened eyes stared at the Commissioner were ludicrously large for him. Skinny, short of legs and long of neck out of all proportion to his trunk, his head emerged from a collar several sizes too big for him, like the periscope of a submarine.

"This is the Commissioner. Go on—speak to him," ordered Kelcey.

From somewhere in his baggy, dilapidated clothing the man produced an envelope. He handed it to Herkomer. Dirty, as though it had lain on a dusty road, the address, nevertheless, was not obscured. And the envelope was addressed to the Commissioner of Police, New York City. Beneath that title were the two words, "*Important. Reward.*"

It was a peculiar envelope, too, Herkomer

noticed. Its material was not the usual paper. It seemed made of some waterproof stuff. It was unopened, and the Commissioner slit it with a paper-knife from his desk. He read the enclosure, and the observant Kelcey saw his chief's shoulders stiffen.

"What's your name?" demanded Herkomer of the little man.

"Perkins, sir. Peter Perkins, sir."

"Where do you live? What do you do?"

"In Portsmouth, sir, and I do anythin', sir. Gardenin', lookin' after hosses, clammin'——"

"Where'd you find this note?"

"In the main road, sir, just outside the main gates of Mr. Burton Conybear's estate, sir."

"When?"

"This mornin', sir, about four o'clock. I was goin' to dig clams."

"Why didn't you bring it to me at once?"

"Well, I had to dig the clams, didn't I? My mother, she said that if I didn't dig 'em I'd hear from her, and I had to go and do it, didn't I?"

"Did you tell your mother about this note?"

The man—he was plainly half-witted—

cocked his head on one side and winked cunningly.

"And let her get the reward when I ain't had anythin' to smoke for a week? I didn't tell nobody anythin'. I just told her I was goin' out for a walk, and I came in here."

"You didn't walk all the way from out on Long Island, did you?" asked Herkomer.

"No, sir. I got rides here and there along the way. I don't suppose I walked over ten miles, sir. But I could of walked all the way," he said boastfully. "Thirty miles ain't nothin' to me. Why, I could walk a hundred miles—a thousand miles if I wanted to."

"But you wouldn't want to, would you? You'd like to ride back on a train, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, sir, with the reward money."

"Well, we'll see about the reward a little later. Hungry?"

"Yes sir."

"Kelcey, turn him over to some one and have him fed. A good meal, and a good cigar."

The little man's face glowed with delight. He took Kelcey's hand as a child would, and

almost danced in his hurry to be fed. Herkomer smiled pityingly after the half-wit.

A hoax, of course, and only a half-witted person would have been tricked by it. The average person, disinclined to be made a butt, would have read the letter even though the envelope was sealed. But this poor man, treated by his mother like the child he mentally was—Herkomer read the letter again. It was undated, and was written in a jerky scrawl upon paper that was of the same apparently waterproofed material as the envelope. He read again:

Commissioner of Police,
New York:

I am a prisoner. Notify my business associates but not the press. Reward the finder of this note, and I will meet all expenses that may be incurred in locating and rescuing me.

BURTON CONYBEAR.

A hoax, yes, but—an alert police commissioner can afford to overlook nothing, especially when the telephone is always at one's elbow.

Herkomer called up Conybear's New York office. He said nothing as to the motive behind his call. He did not wish to be laughed at. His name procured him immediate audience with Conybear's office secretary.

No, Mr. Conybear was not in the city to-day. He had not been in his office for several days. He had no definite office-hours, of recent months. Came when he felt like it, and stayed away when he felt like it. The Commissioner could probably reach him at his Portsmouth estate, however.

Herkomer rang off. If Conybear had been kidnapped, his New York office would know of it, and certainly, despite its dread of publicity, would not hesitate to take the Commissioner of Police into its confidence. The kidnapping of Burton Conybear would be an event of national, of international, importance.

Still, the most unlikely things happened in this world. If the note were genuine, despite the million-to-one chance against its being anything but a stupid hoax, and Herkomer neglected to call up Portsmouth— He got Conybear's country residence on the telephone.

No, Mr. Conybear was not there. The

Commissioner of Police of New York City was inquiring for him? Was anything wrong?

"Why, no," said Herkomer embarrassedly. "I—who is this talking?"

"Henderson, Mr. Conybear's valet, sir, and confidential secretary, in a way, sir, too. If there is anything important——"

"Why, no," admitted the Commissioner. "I got word that Mr. Conybear had been—well, kidnapped, or something like that, and ——"

Henderson, at the other end of the wire, laughed.

"Excuse me, sir, but—you, perhaps aren't aware of the system of guards out here?"

Herkomer felt himself blush. "Why, yes, I know it's a poor jest, but—although such a matter would be, strictly speaking, in the office of the Portsmouth police, still——"

"Quite right of you, sir. And very kind, too, I'm sure. I shall tell Mr. Conybear of your thoughtfulness. By the way, sir, where did such an absurd rumour spring from?"

"Oh, that doesn't matter," grumbled Herkomer. "You say Mr. Conybear's all right.

That's enough. You needn't mention my calling up. The papers——"

"We don't like the papers out here any more than you do, sir," laughed Henderson.

"Thank you again, sir, for ringing up."

"Not at all," said Herkomer. "By the way, Mr. Conybear wasn't in his New York office and wasn't expected."

"Did you tell them of the absurd rumour?" asked Henderson.

"No, I didn't."

"I'm glad of that, sir. It annoys Mr. Conybear when foolish reports are brought to his ears, and some one in the office might have let drop something to a newspaper man—you never can tell, sir. And it would embarrass Mr. Conybear to have the newspapers trailing him, now. I can tell you, sir, for you're discreet, of course. Mr. Conybear has some important business matters on hand, and has gone up into New England to consult with some associates. He left night before last. I tell you this in strict confidence, sir, of course. Even his office doesn't know of it. But your telephoning me, your natural alarm, sir, make me feel that Mr. Conybear would have no ob-

jection to my telling you this. Good afternoon, sir, thanking you again, sir."

"Not at all. Good afternoon," said Herkomer.

He rang off just as Kelcey knocked. "We've fed the little man, sir," said the Sergeant. "Want to see him?"

Herkomer nodded, and Peter Perkins, smoking a large cigar, was ushered into the office again. The Commissioner of Police was a kindly as well as thorough citizen. A cruel hoax had made this poor half-wit tramp miles over the dusty Long Island roads in the hope of a reward. Well, he should have a reward, if his ambitions were not too lofty.

"Well, have a good meal, Peter?"

"Fine!" Peter smacked his lips.

"Thinking about the reward, now, eh? About how big do you think it'll be?"

"Well, it ought to be a dollar, hadn't it?" asked Peter.

"Well, I should say so," said Herkomer. He winked at Sergeant Kelcey. "It's *two* dollars, Peter, and your fare home, besides."

It was one of the little things that endeared Herkomer to the Force, and that lost nothing

in the telling, although Herkomer never dreamed that the little generousities, which were as natural to him as eating or sleeping, were mulled over at Headquarters, in remote precinct stations or by officers meeting at the intersection of their beats.

His "reward" thrust deep into his trousers pocket, Peter left the office. Herkomer turned his attention for the next half-hour to reading reports, signing orders and the like routine business. Then he locked his desk, made a memorandum of what he expected to do during the evening,—at what hours he might be reached on the telephone, and where,—handed the memorandum to Kelcey and pulled on his light overcoat.

He hesitated a moment, looking at the Sergeant. Commissioner Herkomer had the healthy man's disinclination to be laughed at, but he trusted the good sense and the loyalty of Kelcey. He handed Kelcey the note that Peter Perkins had found in the Long Island dust.

"What do you make of it, Sergeant?"

Kelcey read it slowly, moving his tongue

around his mouth. He nodded toward the telephone.

"I take it you been usin' that little bridge-builder, Commissioner?"

Herkomer laughed. "Oh, yes—got his office and then his Portsmouth place. Talked with his private secretary out there. Conybear's O. K."

"Then he's O. K., I should say, sir," said Kelcey.

He handed the note back to Herkomer.

"It's a dull day when some new nut don't spring some new wrinkle—ain't that the truth, sir?"

"It certainly is, Sergeant," laughed Herkomer. He reached for his hat, nodded to Kelcey and left the office.

CHAPTER SIX

THE paying-teller of the Seventy-third National Bank looked swiftly but comprehensively at the check and then glanced through his cage at Conybear.

"How'll you have it, Mr. Conybear?" he asked.

"Hundreds," grunted the financier.

The teller reached beneath him. Twenty-five thousand dollars in hundred-dollar bills was more than he had on the counters at either side of him. He shoved several packages through the little opening in the cage. Conybear swept them into an open bag, locked it, glanced at his companion, shrugged his shoulders and started for the bank door.

A tall, handsome man, in the early thirties, accosted him.

"I see you're in town, Mr. Conybear," he said. He nodded curtly to Conybear's companion, who returned the nod in the same casual way. Conybear did not notice the exchange.

"Well, what if I am?" he growled.

"You ought to have attended Amalgamated General's meeting to-day," snapped the tall man.

"So? Just because you're president of this bank, Malcolm, and I keep an account here, don't mean you got any license to advise me."

"I have a right to speak my mind," returned the banker. "When your staying away almost precipitated a panic——"

Conybear's companion touched the financier gently on the elbow. Malcolm did not see the movement. Conybear was tense, rigid; he relaxed.

"I was directin' trusts, Malcolm," he said, "when you were in long dresses. You 'tend to your bank and let me 'tend to my business."

"But it's the public's business, too, and——"

"The public can go to grass! You too," snapped Conybear.

The young banker flushed and stood aside. Conybear and his companion walked to the door, past the uniformed porter, down the bank steps, and into a waiting automobile. Two men, apparently busied at different customers' desks, making out checks, simulta-

neously seemed to decide not to withdraw any money to-day; they sauntered out of the bank. Two other men, lounging on the sidewalk, exchanged glances with the couple descending the steps. As the automobile started off, the four men merged in the crowd.

Inside the automobile Conybear puffed a cigar.

"Well, you put it across, Mr. Carvajal," he said. "Suppose you take your hand off that pop-gun in your pocket now. It kinda gets me nervous."

"That's odd," replied his companion. "It soothes me."

Conybear stared at the young man.

"Do you know, Mr. Carvajal, if you wasn't a Frenchman, I'd say you was a high and handsome kidder."

"Thank you."

Waring forced a smile—with difficulty; his inclination was to scream. Yesterday he had been Philip Waring, victim of Simon Bergson; to-day he was Raoul Carvajal, aide to Simon Bergson. He wondered if it would be safe to explain everything to old Conybear, and together leap from the machine—

he knew it would not stop—and take their chances.

But he had noticed the two men on the sidewalk as he had entered the bank with Conybear; he had seen the two men in the bank; he knew that behind him followed an automobile with at least four men in it; he knew that the driver of this car in which he rode was prepared to die rather than let Conybear escape. And if Waring escaped alone—Conybear would die. And Conybear was too old a man to leap from flying automobiles. It would not do even to let Conybear know that his companion was not the desperate criminal he seemed, but was an American gentleman, playing a part forced upon him. For Conybear might drop some unguarded word. . . . He looked at the old man; the grim lines of defiant defeat were about the financier's mouth.

Waring felt a tremendous admiration for his companion. The best loser he had ever seen! Conybear might be all that the yellow journals termed him, a grinder of the poor, a rapacious forager upon the common property of all, but—he was a high-class fighting-man,

for all that. Waring knew how close Conybear had been to telling Malcolm, president of the bank they had just left, that he was withdrawing this money only under threat of death, at the points of weapons. It had not been fear entirely that had prevented Conybear from speech; it had been discretion. A fool would have spoken; the wise man bided his time.

That was it: to bide one's time! That was what Waring would do. He prayed that those watching in the bank had not noticed Malcolm's nod, a tribute to a very slight acquaintance, or that, if they had noticed it, it had been set down to mere acknowledgment by the banker of the fact that Conybear had a companion.

Waring stole another glance at Conybear; the old man was leaning back now, his eyes half-closed, dreamily. If Conybear could be calm, self-contained, so could Waring—especially as Waring would have a little freedom soon, freedom to summon the police.

Police? The militia, the regular army, maybe! Bergson was not so destitute of daring followers as "P. R." had thought. There

were plenty of men, dozens surely, scores probably, and hundreds maybe, who would die in executing the commands of Bergson, chief of the Inner Council.

The Inner Council! Inner Council of *what*? Waring reviewed all that had happened since he had mounted the steps at 17 Hancock Square. He had rung the bell; a suspicious-eyed man—who was called Ranney, he now knew—had admitted him. He had given this man his letter. Then he had been taken to a room on the ground floor, where his letter had been read by a sunken-eyed, predacious-nosed, frail-seeming old man. That man had been Simon Bergson.

That was yesterday. And to-day he was one of Bergson's band, a band whose object was to—what? Bewildered, dazed by the sudden transition from amateur sleuth to amateur criminal, Waring tried to itemise the various things that had led to this transition.

First, of course, there was his determination to impersonate Carvajal; second, he *had* impersonated Carvajal; third, he had met Bergson and been accepted at his face value; fourth, Bergson had not asked him anything about

“P. R.,” fortunately enough. And as to the name that those initials stood for, Waring had only learned, from Bergson’s remarks, that the first stood for “Peter.” Fifth, Bergson had explained to his new ally that there would be immediate work for him on the morrow; sixth, the pseudo-Carvajal had dined with Bergson and several other men, whom Bergson had designated as members of the “Inner Council of the Society,” about the nature of which “Carvajal” would learn more later on. Seventh, after a long cross-examination as to his life in Paris, from which, thanks to a ready imagination, a certainty that Bergson knew no more than the letter of introduction contained, and a really wide knowledge of Paris, Waring had emerged triumphant.

Eighth item: a night of sleep that followed some hours of wondering if he had enough evidence against Bergson to cause his arrest and the conclusion that he had no evidence at all. Ninth, the astounding information that Burton Conybear, of whom, like every one else in the world, he had heard, was a prisoner in this very house, and that it was designed to visit one of the banks where Conybear had a

deposit and draw money for the immediate expenses of the "Society." Tenth, Bergson's command—it was nothing less than that—that "Carvajal," because he was an absolute stranger in the country, should be the one to be Conybear's companion in the visit to the bank. Eleventh, Waring's quick suspicion that Bergson was not the trustful person that he seemed, but that Conybear's companion would be watched as closely as was the financier himself. Twelfth, Waring's further understanding that he was chosen for this delicate mission because Bergson was somewhat of a gambler. The explanation of this twelfth item was that Bergson was the sort of person who would stake much on a single chance. At least, so he seemed to Waring.

For the man who had obtained almost a million and a half from Carey Haig, and who held Burton Conybear a prisoner, was surely not going to be content with a pitiful twenty-five thousand from the financier. Therefore, Bergson's demand upon Conybear that the latter cash a check for twenty-five thousand was but a preliminary, a feeler. If Bergson could get away with this, without arousing

suspicion—Bergson must have something tremendous on the tapis, something whose execution he dared not attempt until he had received previous assurance that he could essay it in safety. This bank matter would be that assurance if it succeeded.

And it only went to prove that what had just transpired was but a minor incident in the ventures planned by Bergson. Had it been a big thing, of importance, Bergson would have selected for its execution only true, tried followers. Bergson, then, must have looked, not too unwillingly, at the possibility of the violent death of Conybear, and the equally violent death of "Carvajal." If Conybear proved recalcitrant, if "Carvajal" proved treacherous—Bergson's watchers in the bank, in the automobiles that followed Waring and Conybear, on the sidewalk, had had their instructions, beyond a doubt.

Waring dismissed all his theorising. Facts were the only things that counted. And the facts were these: In pursuance of his plan to find out something about Bergson that would return to him the money got from Carey Haig, Waring had let himself in for something tre-

mendous. He had become, apparently, one of Bergson's "Society," had assisted in a crime—had, therefore, evidence against Bergson. Now the only thing that remained to be done was to present that evidence to the authorities. His own part in to-day's crime—making Conybear draw money under threat of death—could be explained satisfactorily. Conybear would bear no grievance against the man who had held an automatic on him this afternoon.

Waring smiled grimly as a traffic policeman held up the car for a moment. One word to the officer— He shook his head. He did not propose to die just yet awhile.

The car rounded a corner into Hancock Place. It stopped, and Waring got out. Two other cars had also stopped, one fifty feet west, the other a dozen yards to the east. Any lingering notion that he might tell Conybear his true position left Waring's mind. A false gesture, even, and those watchers might suspect. . . . He gently impelled Conybear through the gate, along the path and up the stoop. In a moment they found themselves inside the house.

Bergson, his lips curled in a malignant smile, met them in the hall.

"Take Mr. Conybear to his room," he said; "then come to me."

"Wait a minute," said Conybear. "I'd like to talk this matter over with you?"

Bergson's smile broadened. "You're willing to make certain pledges—about turning over your property to the Society?"

"Don't talk foolishness! But I'm willing to settle—right. And to give guarantees of immunity—what do you say to a million—cash?"

"What do I say? Well, Mr. Conybear, if some one offered you a small fraction of what you might have by reaching out your hand for it, what would you say?"

"It ain't that way. Not at all! Because you get me to draw twenty-five thousand, you don't imagine you can get more than I've just offered you, do you? Why, I don't keep a million cash in all my banks together!"

"No? But how about your securities, that might so easily be turned into cash, Mr. Conybear?"

"That takes time, and you know it. And

my brokers would have to see me. And they'd have to see me alone, too, and—you can't do deals like that just with letters. You got sense, Bergson. This Society of yours, the way you got hold of me—it all proves you got brains. But don't let 'em get addled. Listen to reason. All the cash I've got on deposit, no prosecution——”

“Make it all the cash you have in vaults, and we'll begin to talk real business, Mr. Conybear,” interrupted Bergson.

Conybear's jaw dropped. “You mean that——”

Bergson's sneer became ineffable in its superiority.

“And they call men like you brainy! A poor, docile people allow your sort of men to rule them! Whereas, the true secret of your success lies in the fact that you have assumed, and correctly assumed, that the people have no brains and therefore will permit you to do as you will. If it were your own brains that had made you the richest man in the world, you would recognise brains when you met them. You would not merely flatter, or assume that we of the Society are a cut cleverer than the

mass of the people whom you rule. You would recognise that we have real brains, the sort of brains that overlook nothing. Mr. Conybear, why do you suppose I sent you to the bank this afternoon?"

"To get money, wasn't it?" snapped Conybear.

"When I could have taken your check, had it cashed through any one of a dozen sources? You amaze me! 'To get money!' Assuredly, my dear sir, the upkeep of this Society costing something more than a trifle, and ready cash being needed, but—why did I send *you*?"

"Go on, tell it," growled Conybear.

Waring hung on Bergson's answer.

"Obvious reasons must have occurred to you," said Bergson, still with that air of superiority. "For instance, if you were shot down in a public place, other gentlemen might be more amenable to reason. You thought of that?"

Conybear waved his hands. "Oh, go on, tell the rest of it."

"Well, you have several millions in gold in the vaults of the Seventy-third National. You have studied financial history, Mr. Conybear.

You remember that Jay Gould once defeated a coalition against him by his ability to show his enemies that he had over fifty million in cash to use against them. In many ways you are like Jay Gould.

“You are perfectly right when you say that selling off securities without personal orders from you would be difficult, dangerous for us of the Society. Also, despite all the precautions we have taken, the advance information we have gathered, we have not—as you suggested the other night—been able to read your thoughts, Mr. Conybear. Therefore, we do not know—*did* not know—but that you had some private arrangement about drawing cash yourself. After all, you have some brains, Mr. Conybear. Such a contingency as has happened to you might very well have suggested itself to you. We know that you have not been yourself to a bank to draw money in many months—years, almost. If the possibility of what has happened to-day had ever entered your mind, you might have arranged with your various bankers not to honour your checks, though you presented them yourself,

unless you said or did some particular thing. You might have arranged to be followed.

“You see, Mr. Conybear, we overlook nothing. Your vaults, we happen to know, can be opened by you only. Your presence is not only desirable; it is necessary. If, among other things, we plan to obtain the contents of your vaults, you must go with us. And it is just as well to be certain that your failure to say or do something will not mean our apprehension. But if you thought of no such precaution to protect your bank-account, it is not likely that you thought of any such thing with reference to your stored cash.”

Conybear's eyes expressed open admiration. “You got a head on you,” he said. “But how do you know I ain't been followed to-day?”

Bergson shrugged his shoulders. “Those members of the Society who were at the bank just now are not amateurs, Mr. Conybear. You would never have been driven here had suspicion been aroused. And now—have I made your position clear, Mr. Conybear?”

Conybear's eyes were puzzled now. “Clear enough—as far as you go,” he said slowly.

"But—supposin' you get my cash reserve? What then?"

"Then we will talk of other matters, Mr. Conybear."

"H'm! I thought so. Something bigger than fifty million, eh?"

"Much bigger," said Bergson placidly. "Do you feel, now, Mr. Conybear, like surrendering everything you have to the Society?"

"And then what?"

"Like joining the Society and aiding its work?"

"What is its work?"

"That will be explained when your mind is prepared for it. There is a beginning. It is useless to struggle; it is better to yield."

Conybear turned to Waring. "Come on, Carvajal," he said. "Take me to my room. I want to take a nap."

"You prefer to be forced, then?" asked Bergson.

Conybear stared at him. "Why, you poor fish!" he said. "Do you honestly think you can get away with much more than you've got away with to-day?" He stumped toward the

stairs. Over his shoulder he flung his offer. "One million—cash! That's all."

Bergson smiled. "Take him to his room, my Carvajal. Then come to my study."

In silence Conybear mounted the stairs; he said nothing as Waring opened the door of his room. He was stripping off collar and tie as Waring locked the door. Once again Waring characterised him as a fine loser—something more: one who refused to admit that he was a loser. Waring's lips tightened. Conybear was *not* a loser. Once Waring got outside this house, beyond the menace of half a dozen watchers—

In the ground-floor room that he called his study, Bergson was waiting for him. The mysterious chief of the "Society" looked up with an expression as close to friendly approval as his thin lips and harsh eyes could manage.

"You have done well, my Carvajal—as well as I would have expected from one whom Peter sent to me. Too bad you work from greed alone."

Waring shrugged his shoulders. "There are safer ways of satisfying greed than I have

used to-day. I am not greedy. A fair share
_____”

He paused, impudent expectation in his expression.

“So? You want money from us already?”

Again Waring shrugged his shoulders. He looked down at his clothing.

“Those things that I wore aboard the ship—they were soiled, worn. And I could only buy what I have on. There are many things needed in a gentleman’s wardrobe that I lack.”

He hung on Bergson’s words. It was such a transparent excuse, and yet a perfectly natural one. And Bergson was a fanatic; and fanatics, though quick to suspicion, trust wholly while they trust at all.

Bergson smiled. “I forgot that dancers are dandies. Be careful, my Carvajal. Have nothing sent.”

Across the desk at which he sat he handed money; Waring took it. He found himself outside on the street almost before he realised it. How easy! He could hardly believe it possible. And yet—why not? There was no reason on earth why Bergson should suspect him, should think that there was more

than a dandy's desire to be well-dressed behind "Carvajal's" desire to go out. Had not "Carvajal" played a dangerous, criminal part to-day? Why should Bergson suspect?

Waring held to a careless walk until he had rounded two corners and found himself at the foot of Seventh Avenue. Then he almost ran into a saloon—not for a drink, but to use the telephone which he knew would be there.

But inside the booth he hesitated. The police—well, the way they had handled the Carey Haig matter, their inability to—*focus*—made him pause. A score of policemen, or even plain-clothes men,—and nothing less than a score would be sent to the rescue of Burton Conybear,—would be the signal for Conybear's death. Bergson was a fanatic, and fanatics kill! The man who would kidnap the financier, send him to a bank and make him draw money. . . . Waring had almost forgotten his own grievance against Bergson in the greater affair that was going on.

No, not the police! And as for the Greenhams—he wondered if they had the delicacy needed for this matter. Bergson must be surprised; his followers in the house at 17 Han-

cock Square must be surprised; otherwise—Waring shuddered. Somehow, in this afternoon he had acquired a real affection for Burton Conybear. He might not think of his own fortune; he might not think of crushing the “Society” of which Bergson stood at the head, until he had thought of some means of rescuing Burton Conybear. And it was not fair to the financier that his life or death should depend upon the judgment of Waring alone. Waring called up Conybear’s city offices.

That is to say, he asked for the number. But they had visited the Seventy-third National just at the closing hour. The automobile had taken a long and roundabout course back to Hancock Square. Waring had remained some time in the house. Conybear’s office was closed. And Waring did not know who were Conybear’s intimates in the city. He knew, of course, that the financier must be acquainted with about every one of importance, but to whom it was best to turn, Waring did not know.

He dismissed the newspapers. They were more dangerous to Conybear than the police. Further, if the rescue could be accomplished

without publicity, Conybear would be immensely pleased, and Waring would like to please the game old chap. He called up Conybear's country home at Portsmouth. Like all the world, he knew of Conybear's country home. And there he would get in touch with some one who would be competent to advise his next move, to join hands with him.

He asked for some member of the family. He did not know that Conybear lived without kith or kin, although aware that he was a bachelor.

"You mean his secretary, sir?" answered a voice.

"Yes, he'll do."

"Just a moment, sir."

Another voice spoke. "This is Henderson, Mr. Conybear's secretary. You wished to speak with me?"

"Yes. My name is Waring—Philip Waring. Mr. Conybear is a prisoner at Number Seventeen, Hancock Place. I have just come from there. You tell me what to do——"

"Just a moment." Henderson's voice was very cool. "You say that your name is War-

ing and that you have just come from there? Have you notified the police?"

"No, I thought it was better not to—until I'd spoken with Mr. Conybear's family, or—some one."

"Quite right, sir. Quite right! And where are you now, Mr. Waring?"

"I'm in a saloon on lower Seventh Avenue. But what difference does that make? Are you going——"

"Just a moment, sir. We have to go slowly. This is rather a surprise, sir."

Waring had been wondering when such a remark would be made. It seemed to him that little incredulity had been evidenced by the private secretary. However, he was terribly excited himself now, after the strain of the past day and night, and it was good that this man at the other end of the wire should be calm. However, Waring's next words were rather resentful.

"You don't seem very much excited or alarmed," he said.

"I've been expecting something like this, sir, and Mr. Conybear has instructed me how

to proceed. His captors call themselves a 'Society,' don't they?"

"Yes, but that doesn't matter now, does it? The thing is to get Mr. Conybear out——"

"Without risk, sir," said Henderson severely, "and without publicity. Will you go, Mr. Waring, directly to Number Eighty-eight, Camp Avenue? Mr. Conybear has made adequate preparations for such an event as this. You will find there men who will take the matter in charge. I shall come by car myself. I shall start immediately."

"Hadn't I better stay around this neighbourhood to watch?" asked Waring. "Can't you telephone?"

"Unfortunately, there is no telephone in the house, there. Mr. Conybear but recently learned of his danger, and there has not been time to install a telephone. Will you go there? And keep the matter secret, save for the men you find there?"

"Why, surely—if you think it best—of course," said Waring.

"At once? We mustn't let a moment's more delay than——"

"Certainly," said Waring.

"I shall be there in an hour," said Henderson.

"All right," said Waring.

He hung up the receiver and stood a moment in sheer bewilderment. Of course, it was not an impossibility that Burton Conybear, richest man in America, and probably in the world, should be kidnapped, and held to ransom, for the kidnapping had happened. But that Burton Conybear should have *foreseen* such a happening—well, he'd done it; therefore it wasn't impossible. And, having decided to leave whatever action might be taken, to the discretion of Conybear's associates, it was up to Waring to obey Henderson's orders. He took a Seventh Avenue car, chafing at its slowness, to Twenty-third Street. There he transferred across town, and at Fifth Avenue jumped from the car and took a taxi to 88 Camp Avenue.

The house was a dignified mansion, of the type to be found still on Murray Hill. Trade had not yet encroached on Camp Avenue. Waring mounted the steps and rang the bell. It was opened in a moment, and Waring stared in amazement at the girl who stood be-

fore him. Yet, even as he gasped at sight of the girl for whose sake he had braved the dangers of a Paris brawl, he became conscious that down the hall a telephone jangled.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HERKOMER played a massé shot very creditably and proceeded to run out his string. Flushed with victory, he led his companion to the grill of the Patroons' Club and ordered two cocktails. But his friend was not dining at the club and so gulped his drink, leaving the Police Commissioner to sip his Tripoli more leisurely.

Thus it happened that, with no companion to engage his ears, Herkomer overheard the talk at the next table. It was not his intention to listen, but Malcolm, the youthful president of the Seventy-third National Bank, didn't seem to care who heard him.

"It's enough to make any one turn socialist," he was telling the man with him, a broker named Boyd. "The men who created Amalgamated General, who control it now, performed, and are performing, a public service. But public service should mean public trust. When it comes to taking your trust so lightly

that you can't bother to attend a directors' meeting, and thereby almost precipitate a panic—it's wrong. I told old Conybear so, to-day."

It was the mention of the old financier's name that made Herkomer prick up his ears and do deliberately what he'd been doing subconsciously—listen.

"You have your nerve," chuckled the broker. "What did he say?"

"Told me to go to grass. He was in my bank to cash a check—with young Phil Waring. Twenty-five thousand dollars. I sort of got the idea the money was for Waring. Don't know why, except that I supposed Waring lost his money in the Carey Haig crash and has been living in a fairly expensive fashion—manservant and all that sort of thing, ever since. And you can't do that on nothing a year. But if he's borrowing—well, I didn't even know that he knew old man Conybear. However, it doesn't concern me. I may be wrong, anyway."

The banker finished the drink before him and rose to leave. Herkomer rose too. At the door of the grill he tapped Malcolm on

the shoulder. The young banker turned with a smile.

“Well, Commissioner, what can I do for you?” he asked.

“I overheard you talking with Boyd,” said Herkomer. “I didn’t mean to listen, exactly, but——”

“Any time I say anything in a grill that I wouldn’t say in my bank or anywhere else, I’ll be a different man, Herkomer,” grinned Malcolm. “Well, you heard me roasting old Conybear. What about it?”

“Nothing much,” answered the Commissioner. “Only—you know his signature, of course. Is this his?”

He showed Malcolm the signature of the note that Peter Perkins had brought from Long Island yesterday, and which Herkomer had since carried. Sensitive to ridicule, not wishing to appear easily hoaxed, he folded the waterproofed paper on which the message was written, so that only the signature showed.

Malcolm scrutinised it carefully.

“Well,” he smiled, “if this is a note, I’ll discount it for you the moment the bank opens in the morning.”

"It's genuine, then?"

"Absolutely," said the banker.

"Much obliged," said Herkomer.

Malcolm lingered a moment; then, seeing that Herkomer was slightly embarrassed and wished to say no more, the banker nodded and left the room.

Herkomer stared at the folded paper in his hand. Conybear's signature! So Malcolm affirmed, and Malcolm, in addition to his financial accomplishments, had invented and caused to be adopted in many banks besides his own a system of verifying signatures that had been very successful. He was by way of being a handwriting expert, and if he said that this was the signature of Burton Conybear, then Burton Conybear's signature it was!

Herkomer walked to the club dining-room and ordered dinner. He ate mechanically, his mind perplexed. Why should old Conybear have written such a note? The old financier was not in the habit of playing practical jokes, Herkomer knew.

He studied the writing of the message. Scrawled jerkily, the words were; nevertheless they were patiently written—even to one

not a graphologist—by one to whom jerkiness and scrawling were natural. There was no evidence of undue haste in the writing. There were no blots, no spatters where the pen had scratched, its points spread by haste. If the signature was genuine, the body of the note was genuine. If Malcolm had noticed nothing wrong about the signature that sprawled half the width of the sheet of paper, then there was nothing wrong about the other words that ran so irregularly across it.

But why? Herkomer leaned back in his chair, his hand playing with the sugar-tongs. His forehead wrinkled. The envelope was creased, and the note within was creased—not with the wrinkles that lying in the dust, or being carried around by Peter Perkins, might have put in them, but with the wrinkles that weeks of continual carrying around in a pocket put in any paper, wrinkles that denote comparative age.

Herkomer pulled from his pocket the last letter that his father had written him before he died seven years ago. Although of different texture, this paper held the same sort of wrinkles and creases, even though Herkomer

had always carried it inside a leather billfold. His eyes softened as he glanced at the lines penned by the old judge, his father; then he put the letter away, and he frowned again.

An old note, carried around in old Conybear's pocket until an emergency—Herkomer sat up stiffly. In due time he could see Conybear and have an explanation of the note. Meantime, wasn't it sufficient that he had the financier's confidential secretary's word for it that Conybear was all right?

The financier had had plenty of time to return from New England. Why, New England might have meant merely across the Connecticut line! Conybear could easily have got back to-day. And if he were seen in a bank, in company with Philip Waring,—whom Herkomer knew by sight and name,—why—Herkomer was becoming an old woman! He must shake off this creepy feeling, unbecoming a grown man and the Commissioner of New York's police.

He signed his check and rose from his chair. As he did so, a boy came to his table.

"You're wanted on the telephone, Mr. Herkomer," he said.

Herkomer walked to the booth just outside the dining-room door.

"This you, Commissioner? This is Kelcey talkin'. Say, you know that note you got this afternoon?"

"Certainly. What about it?"

"Looks like there might be something in it, Commissioner."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"H. Hathway Symons—you know, president of Amalgamated General—has been down here lookin' for you. He's in a terrible stew. The Burnhams have been workin' for him since morning and ain't found out a blasted thing, so——"

"What's *happened*?" roared Herkomer.

"Clurg, Prendergast, Larned and Mikells,—the four biggest guys in Amalgamated except old Conybear,—they're missin'! And Symons can't get hold of Conybear—out of town, they tell him at his Portsmouth place. And at his office they say the same thing. And Symons is in a terrible state; he——"

There were occasions when Sergeant Kelcey let excitement master him. Herkomer could hardly blame him, for if there was more than

hysteria bothering Symons, then the biggest job that Herkomer had ever tackled confronted the Commissioner now. But Kelcey must not be permitted to wander.

“What’s *happened?*” demanded the Commissioner again. “Words of one syllable, Sergeant, and take your time.”

He could hear Kelcey, down at Headquarters, gulp. Then, in the colourless voice in which policemen make reports to their superiors, Kelcey spoke.

“Them four I just mentioned, Commissioner: They, with Conybear, are the real bosses of Amalgamated General. The other directors are dummies. Nothin’ is done unless one of them is present. Well, to-day was the big day with Amalgamated—dividend-day and all that. Well, when none of them four showed up, Symons supposes it’s just a coincidence: Clurg thinks Mikells will be there, and Mikells thinks Larned will be there, and Larned thinks Prendergast— Well, the dividend couldn’t be passed without *one* of them bein’ present; so Symons telephones Larned. He learns that Larned left his house at ten after ‘phonin’ his office he wouldn’t be there till noon. Had to

attend Amalgamated General's directors' meetin', he said.

"Symons don't think much of that; he just tried to get hold of Mikells. And he learns that Mikells had told his wife he couldn't take her to a mornin' musicale uptown because he was late gettin' started for the directors' meetin'. And Mikells don't show up at *his* office, either. Same thing with Clurg and Prendergast; both of 'em said at home this mornin', or at their offices last night, that they was goin' to take in the meetin', and neither of 'em can be located by Symons. Then he 'phones Conybear's office, and the old boy ain't there, and out at Portsmouth they tell him that Conybear's out of town for a few days.

"Well, there's nothin' for Symons to do but to tell his bunch of dummies to postpone the meetin' a week, which they do. Symons wouldn't dare do nothin' with none of the big guys present. And Symons ain't really rattled, then. But along toward afternoon, when Larned's chauffeur arrives home with a headache and a tale of bein' took sick at breakfast, and says he ain't driven the car to-day *at all*; well, Symons gets nervous, especially as not

a word has come from any of them four what left home headed for the meetin'.

“And Symons rushes over to the Burnhams. Here's what they've got, so far: Somebody impersonated Larned's chauffeur. Must have been clever, too, because evidently Larned didn't suspect him, and when he turned the car in at the garage later,—sure, he did that,—no one noticed him particularly. No trace of him.

“Prendergast took a taxi. One of his servants says he 'phoned the Occidental Taxi Company. If he did, the Occidental ain't got no record of the call. No trace of the taxi that took Prendergast away.

“Mikells hadn't got a block in his car when the front wheel rolled off. A limousine followin' stopped; the owner called Mikells by name and offered to take him downtown. That's the last seen of Mikells. Mikells' chauffeur says it was a big blue limousine car. The Burnhams have combed the city for a car like that and have found a hundred, but they all got alibis straight enough.

“And Clurg always walks to the subway from his house and takes an express downtown.

He left the house all right this mornin'—and that's the last seen of him!

“Well, Symons is frightened to death that the newspapers will get hold of it all, but he's twice as frightened at the idea that somethin' phoney has happened to the four of 'em. And that last fear drove him to us. He feels that a private agency, no matter how good it is, ain't the thing to handle this. Well, what's the orders, Commissioner?”

Herkomer could dream and speculate and wrinkle his brows; he could also think and act quickly.

“Detail half a dozen men to look up Philip Waring. Know him? Clubman, amateur explorer, big-game hunter——”

“I got you,” said Kelcey. “Shall they bring him in?”

“If they find him. Has an apartment somewhere——”

“I know,” said Kelcey. “He was in the *Era* last Sunday—that yarn about society bachelors of New York. Picture, too. And address.”

“Send some one over to the *Era* office for a photo' of him, then. Make some excuse

so they won't suspect anything. Have copies made up at once."

"Anything else?"

"'Phone Conybear's Portsmouth place. Get his private secretary—Henderson's his name; tell him that Conybear was seen in the Seventy-third National Bank to-day, cashing a check—with Philip Waring. Ask Henderson if he knows anything of Conybear's relations with Waring. Attend to that now."

"Yes, sir. And you?"

"I'm coming right downtown."

CHAPTER EIGHT

"COME in," said the girl softly. She cast a frightened glance over her shoulder toward the telephone, giving its insistent call.

Waring hesitated on the threshold. Somehow that backward glance of hers galvanised all his dormant suspicion.

Henderson had been *too* cool. In the excitement of the moment of his speaking with Conybear's secretary, he had been glad that Henderson was self-possessed; in the enormity of the crime, it had not seemed too absurd that preparations against the crime's commission should have been of apparent magnitude; in his hurry to get to Camp Avenue, he had been too occupied with his errand to reason calmly about the plausibility of Henderson's words.

But one thing stuck out: Henderson had stated that there was no telephone at 88 Camp Avenue, that there had not been time to install one. That was false. It might be the falsehood of ignorance, but—Waring did not

think so. It had sounded all right when Henderson had said it, but now— If Conybear had feared kidnapping, and had taken precautions because of his fear, one of those precautions would be the installation of a telephone. Henderson had said that there had not been time. But Burton Conybear was the richest man in America. Within five minutes after Burton Conybear had asked for a telephone, a corps of men would have started to do the work.

Henderson, then, had uttered a knowing falsehood about the telephone. Why? There was the rub! Although his nerves tingled with suspicion, Waring did not know where those suspicions pointed. And now the girl spoke again.

“Please,” she said.

She was not the merry-eyed convent-girl-on-a-lark that he had driven to a Paris hotel one night last winter. Nor was she the frightened-eyed girl whom Carvajal the dancer had accosted. In her eyes then, as now, had been fear, but it was a disdainful, prideful fear—the fear of something unclean touching her. The fear that Waring saw in her eyes now

was something different; it was a fear that seemed to have eaten into her soul; it was horror.

And she was the girl of his dreams, the girl whom, absurd though it seemed, he loved. Waring no longer hesitated; though every instinct warned him to back down the steps, he crossed the threshold. As he did so a voice called from the floor above—a masculine voice:

“Have you answered the door, Claire?”

The girl pointed toward an open door. She put her finger on Waring’s lips. The intimate touch thrilled him, although he noted, with anger against some one undefined, that the finger was hot, feverish. She motioned him toward the door, gently urged him with her hand on his shoulder now. Waring tiptoed into a large room. But he stood by the door.

“The door?” He marvelled at the coolness of the girl’s voice. “It’s the telephone that’s ringing.”

“I heard the door-bell too.”

Waring watched the girl. He saw her open the door, not quietly, as she had done when he rang, but noisily.

"There is no one here; it must have been the 'phone," she called.

"Well, answer it, then," snapped the voice upstairs.

It was not a request; it was a surly command. Waring trusted that he would meet the speaker soon.

"I was just going to," she replied.

She walked swiftly down the hall and lifted the receiver to her ears.

"Yes," she said. "Yes. . . . All right."

She hung up the receiver and came down the hall. Her face was white.

"Who was it?" called the voice from upstairs.

"It was a mistake; some one got the wrong number."

Waring marvelled again at her coolness, at the firmness of her voice, the nonchalance, almost, with which she uttered that which he divined to be a falsehood.

"Oh," grunted the voice upstairs. "Stay down there where you can answer it if it rings again."

Again Waring resented the quality of command in the voice, again hoped that he would

meet the speaker soon. But the girl answered calmly that she would. Then, humming, she entered the room where Waring stood. She crossed to the middle of the room, Waring following her. Her humming ceased.

"Go," she said, "quickly! Mr. Henderson just telephoned. It's the second time. His car's broken down, and he is going to take the train at Rollansville. He said that you knew—that he'd tricked you into coming here—that's why I was waiting at the door—so ready. I didn't tell them—upstairs. I said—it was the grocer—please go."

Waring looked at her. Her bosom heaving, her face no longer white, but crimson with excitement, she was even more alluring than the girl he remembered.

"But you asked me in," he protested.

"I wanted to speak to you—to warn you—I thought that he"—and she pointed upstairs—"was asleep. But he's awake—please go."

"And leave you here? Tell me—where do you come in, anyway? Do you know what's going on? Is Henderson——"

"I know it all! Henderson is with them. He—they'll kill you. Please go."

"Henderson won't be here for a while yet, if he's just taking a train. I want you to explain——"

"But the others! Bergson—they'll be here. I haven't dared to go out—not even to tell the police. And I've been afraid—they might kill Mr. Conybear—and the others——"

She put her hands to her face.

"Please," said Waring. "*Please!* If you'll tell me—what you know——"

"Nothing," she answered. "Except that Mr. Conybear and some other rich men have been kidnapped by a name named Bergson, and that Henderson, Mr. Conybear's secretary, is in the plot."

"But what are you doing here? Tell me that!"

"My uncle—I have been living with him in Paris. But I was tired of France. I wanted to come back to America. I insisted, and he let me. But—there were certain things—he explained certain facts to me—that I had not known—things that bound him to Bergson. And I told him that I'd help him—break those bonds. . . . I thought I could, but—oh, I *can't* explain now. Please go."

"To the police?"

"Yes. No—oh, I don't know. If the police could come upon them without alarming them—oh, I don't know."

Her body shook as she fought against a sob. Waring patted her shoulder.

"It's all right. I felt as you do—about the police. But—*something* must be done. Henderson fooled me——"

"Oh, if Uncle had sent the man he was going to send. He told me—when I left him—that he'd send some one. But maybe he was afraid. Bergson is dangerous——"

Waring suddenly remembered the name of her uncle. Peter Randall! And "P. R." undoubtedly stood for that name! But it was hardly the time to tell her that her uncle supplied Bergson with murderers. If she thought that Peter Randall aimed at Bergson, instead of standing with the chief of the Inner Council of the mysterious society, let her think so—for the present, at any rate.

"Look here," he said. "We can't stay here—either of us. You come with me. We'll go down to Police Headquarters. I'll tell

them all I know, and you tell them what you know. We can slip out now, quietly."

"And they'll miss me, and suspect, and perhaps kill those men at once. You go. I'll stay, and——"

Her voice died away. At the front door were men entering the house. She looked wildly about her. But the only door to the room was the one through which they had entered.

"The window," she gasped.

But Waring shook his head. If he were to die, he preferred to die facing his enemies; he did not care to be shot in the back. But the first words of Bergson, bursting into the room, told him that death was not too near to him to be avoided, if his wits were quick. For Bergson's suspicions were not yet awakened.

"You, Carvajal?" he cried. "What are you doing here?"

Waring saw the light of hope—mystified, yet still hope—flash in the girl's eyes. And Waring, fighting for his life, he knew, found that his wits were sharpened by his danger.

"I saw a man spying when I left Hancock Square," he said. "He followed me, and I—"

I eluded him, and then *I* followed *him*. I saw him go to a telephone—in a saloon. He left and I still followed him. He came to this house, mounted the steps, and I thought that he would enter. But he seemed to change his mind. He descended and walked to your subway. I am not familiar with its passages. I lost him there. So—I returned here and decided that I would make some investigations. I rang the bell; the young lady admitted me, and she asked if I came from you. And so I knew that I had done well in coming here. For though I have only been here a moment, she has told me that she was one of us——”

“Your tongue is loose, Mademoiselle,” snapped Bergson.

“Not so,” retorted Waring. “It is I—I who speak too freely. But—we are both of the same society. There is no harm done.”

“No,” cried Bergson, “—none at all, except that the police suspect, except that your spy, one Philip Waring, has probably gone to the police by this time, if Henderson—the fool, the *fool!*”

“What did he do?” asked the girl.

“Do? The police telephoned him this after-

noon—told him that there was a rumour that Conybear was kidnapped. And Henderson, because he put them off with fair words, thought that they were deceived, and so did not tell me until just now. He feared that I would take needless alarm. The fool! The fool!”

Waring had seen angry men in his life before, but he had never seen one so mastered by rage as was Bergson now. And still, though his nostrils twitched, Bergson seemed to have a dual identity, one part of which raged at the absent Henderson while the other planned swiftly.

“Henderson is coming here?” he asked the girl.

She nodded.

“You told the others?”

She shook her head. “They have been drinking. I—I am afraid of them.”

Waring, with her words, thought he understood the surly quality of the voice upstairs. He looked at Bergson, to see how the man would take this news. Bergson seemed unimpressed.

“They would not drink enough to hurt themselves. Although I will admit that Cantrell

and Durney, without liquor at all, are not attractive to a woman, and with a drink——” His eyes suddenly narrowed. “But how did you expect, if you had not told them, to handle this Waring—did Henderson fail to tell you that he had sent this Waring, who had telephoned him?”

“Henderson said that Waring was coming here, and told me to detain him. But those beasts upstairs—I was going to wait until Waring got here and then tell them.”

“If I could only get people who do no thinking for themselves,” raged Bergson. “If you had told them, when he came to the steps they would have captured him. And Henderson—if Henderson had not delayed telling me that in some manner the police had got wind of Conybear’s capture by us— I am cursed with the brains, the infinitesimal brains of those who surround me, their desire to think for themselves, to save me alarm.”

He turned to Ranney, who had entered the room with him.

“If that Waring has gone to the police—let those swine upstairs——”

But at this moment the "swine" entered, attracted by the voices downstairs.

"What's wrong?" demanded the foremost, whose voice was that of the man Waring had heard speaking to the girl.

"The police know of this place," snapped Bergson, "—doubtless of the other, too. But if they go there, they will find the birds have flown, and if they come here—you shall pay for your drinking, my friends."

"We've not drunk a drop," protested the second man.

"She says you have; why lie to me?" demanded Bergson.

"Why—she—she——"

"It doesn't matter now. We will settle later the price you pay." He turned to Waring. "This Waring, who telephoned Henderson—he said that his name was Philip Waring. You, Carvajal, find out where he lives. He is a fool! None but a fool would have come to this house on so flimsy an excuse. But—he thought better of it. He may be the sort of fool to think again. He—he can't *know* anything. And he may think again before he tells the police. It is a chance. And

we must take that chance. You, Carvajal, find him. Kill him!"

Waring's nerves were taut, and yet he almost laughed at Bergson's command. To find himself, and kill himself—but his sense of the ludicrous was less insistent than his sense of peril.

"And after that?"

"*You* are a man, Carvajal," cried Bergson. "No doubts, no wondering, no thinking for yourself! After that, you say? You came here, on the *Montania*, as Jacques Pelletier, eh? Then resume that name. Go to—oh, the *Plutonia*, and remain there."

"And if I can't get this Waring?"

"Try! I shall delegate others, too, as soon as— We have talked enough. There are two cars outside. Come——"

"But Henderson?" said one of the men.

"He thinks, and not always foolishly. He will telephone from near by before he comes here. If there is no answer, he will go to one of the offices—quick."

There was not a police officer in sight as he reached the sidewalk. There was not a man within a block. Helplessly—it would do no

good to attack half a dozen armed men by himself—Waring watched the two cars drive off. There was not even a taxi in sight whereby he could trail them. He could think of no excuse to detain the girl. He could think of nothing, save the fact that, with the Society at his mercy, he had been duped by Henderson and was lucky to have escaped with his life, much less capture the kidnappers of Conybear and rescue that millionaire.

This house was deserted of the Society; the Hancock Square house was deserted. Bergson, whether from caution or because it simply wasn't necessary to waste valuable time giving instructions to his latest recruit, had not told Waring where the "offices," to one of which he had said that Henderson would go, were located.

And there was no use in his trying to locate Henderson. That treacherous gentleman would doubtless do just what Bergson prophesied that he would do. From some place he would telephone, get no answer, take alarm—Waring felt like a fish out of water. He did not know what to do.

Of course, he could still go to the police.

But if he did, what could he tell them, of any value? That he had located Bergson, had helped to force Burton Conybear to draw money from the bank—there was the weakness of his position. The police would not complaisantly believe everything that Waring told them. They would arrest Waring on suspicion, anyway. If he could lead the police to Conybear's prison, matters would be different. But if he could merely tell them that he had pretended to be one of Bergson's gang, and could not tell them where the gang was now— The police were an unimaginative lot; they would not believe that any one, an innocent any one, would have found it necessary to assist in a crime in order to get evidence. The police would ask why Waring had not denounced the plotters in the bank. They would laugh at Waring's fear that both Conybear and himself would be instantly killed. No, if Waring went to the police now, he would, at the very least, be put under surveillance. And Bergson's men would soon discover that "Carvajal" was shadowed, would wonder why, would learn that the police were shadowing, not "Carvajal," but *Waring*. Trust Berg-

son's crew to learn so simple a thing as that.

At this the plot to raid the Conybear vaults would be abandoned, and some other scheme would be cooked up and would be put through without interference from a baffled police-department. Waring could help better if he delayed informing the police until he was in with Bergson once more—as he would be, if he registered at the Plutonia as Bergson had commanded.

Maybe it was his duty to inform the police, but—he was not a member of the police-force. If he chose to go ahead and do some detective work of his own, he was well within his rights in so doing—the more so, inasmuch as he would be, perhaps, saving Conybear from death. For the girl whom the voice of Cantrell had called “Claire” had had the same thought, at first, as Waring: that summoning the police meant Conybear's death. There was danger that way.

Waring thought of the girl. Even now, perhaps, Bergson was discovering that she lied, that Cantrell and Durney had not taken a drink, that she was not in danger at their hands. Still, Bergson had seemed to know

that the men upstairs were drinking men; Bergson could not pick and choose, in a venture like this, as the president of a corporation would select his employees. Bergson must make the best of what material he could gather.

No, Bergson would not believe their protestations of complete abstinence. Claire would not be blamed for failing to give them Henderson's message at once. And she was quick-witted enough to explain away her failure to tell Cantrell and Durney of "Carvajal's" arrival. She was clever, and probably safe enough, and yet— Waring's thoughts were not pleasant as he turned in the direction of his Twenty-eighth Street apartment. To have seen her again, and to have lost her so soon!

Waring's intention to play a lone hand hardened. The girl, like himself, was innocent of wrongdoing. But she would be subjected to arrest, to the notoriety and shame of a trial, maybe, if the police captured her along with the rest of the gang—unless Waring so arranged matters that her innocence was demonstrated in advance by her helping in the capture of the gang. Waring could not ar-

range that, if he were suspected by Bergson. And suspected by Bergson he would undoubtedly be if he went to the police—even if the police did not arrest him, but merely had him trailed. He was back at the start of his reasoning.

Yes, he must play a lone hand, for her sake as well as his own. And despite her peril and his own, he could hardly forbear smiling as he turned down Fifth Avenue. It *was* absurd, this commission to stalk and slay himself.

CHAPTER NINE

“WELL, what have you done?”

Kelcey, standing stiffly at attention, waited until the Commissioner had hung his coat and hat upon a hook. Then he answered.

“Sent over to the *Era* office for a photo’ of Waring. Ought to be here any minute. Ordered a hundred copies made as soon as possible and sent to each precinct. Telephoned Portsmouth. Henderson not there.”

“Not there?” Herkomer was at his desk now, and he stared at the sergeant. “Where is he?”

“Servant answered that he’d gone to New York awhile ago on business.”

Herkomer frowned. “What else did you do?”

“Sent six men off in seach of Waring. Looked him up in the Blue Book. Belongs to the Exploration, the Bachelors’, the Mummers’ and the National clubs. Man to each of them and a couple to his apartment.”

"Who's his lawyer?"

"Sent a man to the *Era* as you ordered. Told him to look up Waring in the 'morgue' there. Probably have all that information when he returns, sir."

"Send some one out to interview him, whoever he is. Get all you can about Waring's finances; see if he owns any property that he could have mortgaged to Conybear. See if——"

A knock on the door interrupted him. Kelcey admitted a uniformed man who laid on the Commissioner's desk a sheet of paper. It was a brief *dossier* of Waring. Herkomer nodded comprehensively at Kelcey.

"Very quick work, Sergeant."

He glanced at the terse sketch of the career of Philip Waring. Complete, it told little of Waring that Herkomer was not already vaguely aware of, save that it stated the name of the attorney who had, while Waring was crossing the Atlantic last winter, represented him at the early inquiries into the Carey Haig smash.

"This may help a little," said the Commissioner. "Samuel Balch is Waring's attorney."

At least, he was at one time. You've worked fast, Kelcey. But I guess we need speed, at that."

"Yes, sir, I imagine so. Shall I send a man out to this Balch?"

"Better. What else is being done?"

Kelcey shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing, sir. I've told Captain Casey to drop everything else the detective bureau has on hand. There was a raid planned for to-night. Strong-arm Squad was going to visit Tex Granville's house on Forty-third Street. He's running a wheel pretty openly——"

Herkomer dismissed Tex Granville's gambling-house with an impatient gesture.

"Have 'em stay here." He tilted back in his chair and eyed his subordinate, who, because of his secretarial relation, was closer to the Commissioner even than the civilian deputies or the civilian secretaries whom the exigencies of politics had forced upon him.

"Kelcey," said Herkomer, "if you were in my place now, what would you do?"

Kelcey sighed. "Well, sir, first of all I'd pray God that the newspapers wouldn't tum-

ble to this for a while. Then I'd pray Him that I'd have a little accident, like a busted leg, sir, or smallpox, or typhoid fever, or appendicitis, or somethin' nice and mild compared to what's goin' to happen once the public learns about this—somethin' that would keep me confined to the house, and——”

“Help you dodge responsibility? I don't believe you, Sergeant,” chuckled Herkomer.

“Well, I'd *pray*, anyway,” grinned Kelcey.

Herkomer put humour away from him.

“The Greenhams? What are they doing?”

“What do they ever do except run up an expense-bill?” demanded Kelcey scornfully.

“Watchin' the ferries and the railroad stations or somethin' nice and original like that, I suppose.”

“You don't think much of that, then? But you sent, or have ordered to be sent, Waring's picture to all the ‘houses’?”

“Well, sir, we got to do somethin', ain't we?”

Herkomer laughed mirthlessly. He changed the subject.

“Why isn't Symons here?”

“I chased him,” said Kelcey. “He was like a wild man, sir, and the night boys from the

papers was about due to drop in, and I didn't want them seein' him here. They'd smell a story, and they'd *get* it, before they was through. And we don't want that to happen."

Herkomer shook his head.

"Who was going to lead the Strong-arm raid?"

"Loot'nant Dan McGaw, sir."

"Better have him do it, after all. It'll keep the newspaper men busy. Tell him to make it spectacular."

"Right, sir. All the frills? Hydraulic jack for the door, and all that?"

"Yes. And red fire and a brass band—anything to get the town talking. It'll keep, help keep, maybe, this other thing dark. And I hardly think, Kelcey, that strong-arm men are what we need for this other matter—just yet. We need—brains, Kelcey."

"Well, you got 'em, Commissioner," said Kelcey. His tone was not one of flattery; it was one of challenge. Herkomer eyed his subordinate.

"You want me to use 'em, eh?"

He stared unseeingly at the *dossier* of Philip

Waring. Back of that, back of the apparent abductions of Clurg, Mikells, Prendergast and Larned, lay Peter Perkins, the half-wit from Portsmouth. And behind Peter Perkins lay the note now in Herkomer's breast pocket. In that note, cast by Burton Conybear into the dust of the Long Island road, lay the solution of the mystery, Herkomer felt.

And yet—how could that be? For the note was old, had been written months ago, at least, and—Herkomer's head whirled. He must not speculate; he must act. He was all business as he turned to Kelcey.

"Have a couple of men go out to Conybear's Portsmouth place. Have 'em stay there till Henderson gets back. Meanwhile, let 'em pump every one out there. Learn as much as they can. And if they get anything at all, telephone it in."

"Yes, sir." Kelcey saluted and left the office.

Herkomer got up and paced the floor. If the four millionaires mentioned by H. Hathway Symons had been kidnapped, and heaven knew it looked as though they had been!—and if Burton Conybear was also a prisoner

—and if Philip Waring, last of a prominent family, well known socially—if Philip Waring were mixed up in the abductions, then Herkomer would need every ounce of the brains with which Kelcey credited him.

This was not an extraordinary conclusion, considering the circumstances. For, as all policemen know, there are two kinds of artists in criminality. First there is the professional criminal who has been at odds with the law since childhood, or who, having lapsed once from the straight road, finds the climb back difficult or undesirable. Second, there is the criminal who has led, so far as the world knows, so far as, often, investigation shows, a blameless life, and yet who is suddenly discovered to have planned a crime of magnitude and executed it with amazing cunning. It is these latter who are the more difficult of apprehension.

For in almost all cases they come from the brainier, better-educated class. They are men—or women, sometimes—of imagination, and imagination means forethought, painstaking care, the drawing-on of the loose ends. At least, it means that in criminality.

And so, having imagination, they are much more dangerous than those of the first class who have drifted into crime, sunk to it through psychological gravity. For the work of this second variety is not haphazard, chance-born; it is calculated, weighed, measured.

Herkomer knew that the case confronting him was the work of the second class of criminal artistry. The appearance of Philip Waring in the affair was proof enough of that—provided, of course, that there was connection between the note found by Peter Perkins and the abductions of Clurg, Prendergast, Larned and Mikells.

And while that connection was unproved, while it was still not at all certain that Burton Conybear was, despite the note he had written, a prisoner at all, if Herkomer should assume that there was connection, it would give him a working basis to go upon. And it was rather improbable that two crimes, so similar in nature, should occur almost at the same time without relation to each other.

It was a crime of the second class. Philip Waring's blood, his position, his life, lifted him above the level of the first class of crim-

inals. A Waring would not jeopardise his whole career without weighing the matter very carefully. He would use imagination; he would forestall the various moves of the police; he would—

Herkomer sat down at his desk. He was a good, capable executive, with a thorough knowledge of police methods. He had studied the Scotland Yard system and the ways of the Continental police. Educated for the bar, hoping to follow in the footsteps of his father, a well-known jurist, Herkomer, taking a course in criminal jurisprudence at a German university, had become interested in municipal government, especially that portion of it relating to enforcing and upholding the law.

Called back to America by an offer of an assistant professorship in his alma mater, his lectures on European police departments had attracted the attention of a municipal welfare league in a large Western city. He had delivered two addresses to that league. Later, the newly elected mayor of New York, anxious to put the police department on a high plane, invited Herkomer to a consultation, with the

result that Herkomer had become Police Commissioner.

Aside from one or two matters that—like the crank who had been refused admittance to the Commissioner and later had given valuable information to a newspaper—were of no real moment, Herkomer had given complete satisfaction to the Mayor, to the press and to the public. Many changes in method and personnel of the force had proved conclusively that Herkomer was more than a mere pedantic theorist, that he was a practical business man with sound sense.

But—and it was the “but” that confronted the Commissioner now—Herkomer knew his own limitations. He was not a detective. He could direct the operation of the detective bureau, could instruct his subordinates to round up “wanted” criminals, could even advise them how to go about that rounding-up process—under certain conditions. And those conditions always had to do with a crime committed by a criminal of the first class. But when a crime such as this occurred,—there had really been nothing quite like it in his experience,—he was at a loss how to proceed.

He thought of Kelcey's description of the Greenhams' activities and shrugged his shoulders. It was but another proof of his oft-iterated opinion: that, as public opinion conceived them, there were no detectives in the world, never had been any detectives in the world. There were policemen, and that was all. And he himself was only a policeman!

And policemen's limitations were so obvious! Policemen could, if lucky, apprehend a professional criminal, after the fact. In rare cases, aided by stool-pigeons, they could catch a professional criminal in the act, or when a crime of violence was committed too openly. But rarely indeed did policemen catch a professional, habitual criminal in the midst of his plans, *before* he had committed the crime he intended.

And as for the imaginative beginner, who had planned every detail, who had brains and education—there was not a chance in the world, hardly, of apprehending such a one before the fact—not, at least, for a policeman. Super-human detectives might do such things, but even they would need something to go upon, to work from.

Herkomer sat down again. He had been pacing the office once more. He was dwelling too much on what *might* happen to the missing millionaires. As a matter of fact, the purpose of the kidnapping didn't matter; the kidnapping itself was a crime. And he could not say that he had nothing to go upon. He had Philip Waring's visit to the bank with Burton Conybear—which might be innocent, but which, if not, gave Herkomer a working basis.

He smiled, although a trifle ruefully. What great detective of fiction was ever given more by the author than this, as a basis from which to deduce? Yes, but Herkomer was only a policeman. And he could deduce nothing, save that it was vital to apprehend Waring. His smile became less rueful. The same deduction, and no more, would be made by the greatest detective that ever mystified an anxious reader.

He'd been forgetting the important fact that Rome was not built in a day, that it had been laid stone by stone. Herkomer's first stone was Waring. Without him as a foun-

dation, there was nothing to build from. He must have patience.

He picked up a newspaper; a little inconspicuous paragraph leaped from the page at him. Tucked away in a corner, there was no reason why he should have read it. It was an item of a hundred words telling about an accident, fatal, to an unidentified man, apparently a Frenchman, who had been run down by an automobile at Twenty-eighth Street. Alarmed by the approach of a tenant of the apartment-house that the man was apparently intending to rob, the victim had fled, been knocked down by a car and instantly killed. And the tenant who had frightened the man to his death was Philip Waring.

Herkomer was never bothered by reports of minor accidents that were plainly no more than accidents. Undoubtedly there was a report of this accident filed away already in the police records. Wondering that the city editors had overlooked the name of Waring and failed to "play up" the story, and deciding—what was true—that the accident was deemed so unimportant in the City of Manslaughter, as New York had been called, that even the name of

Philip Waring could not give it importance, Herkomer reached for a press-button to summon a clerk. He didn't suppose that the accident possessed any more importance than it seemed to possess, but he was obsessed with Waring by now, and anything that would shed any light at all upon the character of Waring was of interest. The telephone at his elbow buzzed, and while he answered the telephone he postponed sending for the record of the accident.

The Headquarters central spoke to him.

"Officer Dooling on the wire, Commissioner."

"All right," said Herkomer.

A moment later Plain Clothes Man Dooling spoke.

"I'm up near the Sinsabaugh place, Commissioner. 'Phonin' from a drug-store round the corner on Madison Avenue. William Sinsabaugh, the railroad man and financier, sir. On the Waring matter, sir."

Kelcey had done more than tell Herkomer that he had assigned men to the pursuit of Waring. He had written their names and their posts on a slip of paper on the Commis-

sioner's desk. Herkomer glanced at this list, now.

"You were detailed to the Exploration Club, Dooling."

"Yes, sir. And the doorman there is Tom Fields. Before your time, Commissioner. He was 'broke' for drunkenness. But he ain't a bad sort, and we remembered each other, and he gave me the tip-off on Waring. Waring had been in there half an hour before I got there. Been in with Mr. Sinsabaugh. They only stayed a minute or two—had a drink, I guess; then they left in a taxi outside the club. The chauffeur was there, and I asked him where they'd gone. Straight to the Sinsabaugh house, he told me. I chased right up here, and Officer Carmichael was on the corner. He knows Sinsabaugh by sight, and he said he'd been on fixed post at the corner for half an hour, and he hadn't seen Sinsabaugh nor anyone else come out. He's watchin' the house now while I 'phone. I told him if Waring came out—Tom Field described him pretty well, and Carmichael says the man that got out of the taxi with Sinsabaugh is that man

—which, of course, the chauffeur havin' no reason to lie——”

Loquacity under excitement was a thing that Herkomer had to contend with frequently. As he had brought Kelcey up awhile ago, so now he brought Dooling back to earth.

“Well, what are you driving at, Dooling?” he demanded.

Dooling coughed deprecatingly. “Sergeant Kelcey said to make a pinch, sir, and if Waring should come out of the Sinsabaugh house I'll do it—or Carmichael, if he should come this minute. But I didn't know but perhaps you was in a hurry, Commissioner, and break-in' in to the house without a warrant and takin' him away——”

He paused, to let the Commissioner digest the inalienable rights of Anglo-Saxons.

“That's all right,” said Herkomer. “You don't need a warrant for murder. I *am* in a hurry. Go to the Sinsabaugh house with Officer Carmichael. Ask for Waring. If he won't come out to see you, effect an entrance any way you see fit. The charge is murder. If he asks you questions, don't answer them. Bring him in!”

“Right,” said Dooling. The receiver clicked, and Herkomer leaned back comfortably in his chair. He forgot all about his worry of a little while back; a policeman was all that was needed—so far. This superhuman detection business was all rot, anyway. And the accident to the unknown man in front of Waring’s house was suspicious enough to justify the charge of murder and protect Herkomer from action for false arrest.

The telephone rang again. Eagerly Herkomer answered it, to hear a very discomfited Officer Dooling state that Waring had slipped through his fingers.

“I didn’t believe Sinsabaugh, sir. The servant who answered the door told me that Mr. Waring was dining with the Sinsabaughs, but Sinsabaugh came out and said there was a mistake. Mr. Waring had gone half an hour ago, and I searched the house, and—he ain’t there, sir. Only guest was a young lady. The butler said Waring hadn’t been there, and there wasn’t any place set for him, and then the servant that answered the door said he must of been mistaken, and—what’ll I do, sir?”

Herkomer sighed. Then he felt his spine

stiffen. William Sinsabaugh was a rising man in the city's affairs, but the law was bigger than any man. Dooling was a painstaking officer; Carmichael was no fool; there was no question but that Waring had been in the Sinsabaugh home. There was no reason for Sinsabaugh to lie about the time of Waring's departure, unless—h'm! William Sinsabaugh was a most daring financier, who had rehabilitated himself after losing one fortune, with amazing rapidity. Could it be possible that—why not? No more impossible than that Philip Waring was mixed up in the bewildering plot!

“You watch the house, Dooling. If Sinsabaugh goes out right away, follow him, and when you get a chance, 'phone here. I'll rush a relief, so that Sinsabaugh won't know that he's being followed, right up to you.”

He hung up the telephone and pressed the button. To the clerk who entered, he said that he wanted Sergeant Kelcey to come to him.

CHAPTER TEN

A HAND, touching him on the shoulder, made Waring experience the sensation that must always be lurking close at hand for the fugitive criminal—the sensation of being “wanted.” He turned like a shot, his right hand clenched, to meet the grinning face of Billy Sinsabaugh.

Waring’s hand relaxed, and he forced an answering smile.

“Jove, Phil, you act as though you expected some one to knife you in the back! You started as though you were sadly in need of a drink. And right here is the place!”

Gripping Waring’s hand within his own mighty fist, Sinsabaugh impelled his friend toward the portals of the Exploration Club, in front of which he had stopped Waring.

A drink would do no harm, thought Waring.

“With you, Billy!” he exclaimed.

Together they entered the club.

“Glad I caught you,” said Sinsabaugh.

"And before I forget it, my thanks for piloting Mrs. Bill Wife home for me."

"Some day, if you continue neglecting her in the shameful fashion that has become your practice, Mr. William Sinsabaugh, I shall pilot her *away* from the Sinsabaugh mansion," said Waring.

"Well,"—and Sinsabaugh eyed his drink knowingly,—“if you ever elope with my wife, Phil Waring, I'll strike you off my list of acquaintances.”

"Devilish unclubby of you, Billy! Do you see me?"

"Here's looking at you!"

They set their glasses down. Sinsabaugh looked the least bit embarrassed.

"Phil!"

"Fire away!"

"About that position I offered you awhile back. Mrs. Bill Wife told me this morning something of what you'd been telling her yesterday—very crude, I thought it, talking about another man fifteen minutes after I'd been summoned for speeding from the railroad-station to the house; but let it pass!" He frowned heavily at Waring.

"Mrs. Willy *must* be more careful or you'll be shooting me," laughed Waring.

"Uh-huh! Well, Phil, how about it?"

"Many thanks, old top, and will you let a beggar starve in his own good way?"

"Told her so! You're a stubborn jackass, Phil Waring. But you can't get out of it as easily as all that. Mrs. William Sinsabaugh has been giving much thought to you, and—well, I've telephoned your apartment three times, and Mike said you were out somewhere, and I didn't dare go home without you, so—come on."

"Eh? Sorry; it can't be done," said Waring.

"How chipper we are! Do you realise that Mrs. Bill Wife told me to come home with you, or not at all?"

"Sorry." Waring smiled, but he began to itch with impatience. Billy Sinsabaugh was one of the very best, but—and Waring's eyes grew merry—Waring had a most important engagement: to seek himself and do murder. The merriment left his eyes. Somewhere in this city Claire was undergoing cross-examination at the hands of Bergson.

"Got to toddle along, Billy," he said. Not for a moment did he think of confiding in his friend. Sinsabaugh would listen, exclaim loudly, and—take matters into his own hands. That meant the police.

"Nothing doing! Listen, Phil! Madge insists that you come up to dinner. Didn't you promise her yesterday that you would?"

Waring had forgotten all about his promise.

"Yes, but something has turned up, Billy, and——"

"And you think we'll let you off, eh? I like that."

"But I intended to telephone, Billy."

"You'd forgotten all about it," reproached Sinsabaugh. "And after Madge has dug up Miss Claire Sorel, niece of some eccentric old buck named Randall, worth a pot of money—eh, what's wrong, old man?"

"What's her uncle's name?" demanded Waring, harshly.

"Randall—Peter Randall. Expatriate. Lives in Paris, I believe. What about it?"

Waring controlled his features as best he could.

"You say that she's going to be at your house to-night? Sure?"

"Why not? I 'phoned Madge awhile ago saying that I hadn't been able to locate you, and she said that she'd found Miss Sorel at the Plutonia and that Miss Sorel was coming to dinner all right and that I *must* locate you. You see, Phil, you've been so blamed shy and offish since the Carey Haig smash that we don't trust you. You're too frequent with your last-minute regrets."

There was some little truth in Sinsabaugh's remarks. People urged Waring; they refused to take "no" for an answer. Waring had been compelled—or felt that he had been, which amounted to the same thing—to accept many invitations, to send regrets later. It was silly of him, he knew, and yet he had a stubborn pride that recked not of silliness. He was not the decently-well-to-do Phil Waring any more; and he would not become a hanger-on at society's affairs—which, if he but knew it, was one of the reasons, though perhaps a minor one, why people still wanted him so badly.

It was impossible that the Claire of the Paris restaurant, of the house on Camp Ave-

nue, should be the Claire Sorel that was Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh's friend. But it was also quite impossible that Waring should be embarked upon so amazing and desperate an adventure as he found himself let in for. It was still more impossible that Burton Conybear should be the captive of a band of criminals. Yet these last two things had come to pass. And it seemed that the first had, also.

"Are you *sure* that Miss Sorel will be there? Has Madge heard from her to-day?"

"Ten minutes before I 'phoned—and that was half an hour ago—Madge had her on the 'phone at the Plutonia. Why, Phil Waring, you old hider-out in the tall grass, have you seen Miss Sorel? Do you know her?"

"Why—er—maybe I do," said Waring stammeringly. "I—I'd better run home and dress and——"

"Not to-night. This is informal to the last notch. I made Madge promise that it would be on my first night home with her in months. You come as you are, and you come now, d'ye hear?"

"I hear," said Waring.

They left the club and taxied directly to the

Sinsabaugh mansion, Waring hardly hearing, on the short ride, anything that Sinsabaugh said. For his mind, bewildered enough, had still more amazement to contend with. How *could* the Claire of the Camp Avenue house be going out to dine this evening, after the events of the past few hours? How was it possible? How could she have been at the Plutonia half or three-quarters of an hour ago? She had been at the Camp Avenue house at that time. And there could not be two Peter Randalls, living in Paris, each with a niece named Claire. That was stretching coincidence too far, to believe that. And the "P. R." who had written the note that Waring had found on Carvajal *must* be Peter Randall, for "P. R." had sent Carvajal to Bergson, and the Claire of the Camp Avenue house had said that her uncle had intended to send a man to the chief of the mysterious menacing society.

But he could not unriddle these perplexities now. He would meet Miss Sorel in a few minutes; he could wait until then.

Upstairs, in Sinsabaugh's study, Waring asked permission to use the telephone. An explanation of his absence from the apartment

was really due Mike, his Japanese. Also it would be just as well to give Mike a hint, necessarily vague because of Sinsabaugh's presence, as to the use of discretion should any inquiries be made for Mr. Philip Waring.

But Central reported to him that she could not raise his apartment; and Waring, after a final futile protest as to his daytime garb, descended to the drawing-room with Billy.

Madge Sinsabaugh and a young woman were awaiting them. Waring heard himself introduced; he felt himself bowing over the hand that the young woman who answered to the name of Miss Sorel extended toward him. He knew that he was uttering some commonplace, but what the words were he could not have told.

For he had convinced himself that Miss Sorel and the girl whom he had last seen in the company of Simon Bergson *must* be the same person. It was thoroughly incredible that it should prove otherwise. Coincidence was stretched to the last notch, if there were *two* Peter Randalls, and *two* nieces named Claire.

Keyed up, firmly of the belief that ten min-

utes alone with Claire would solve the mystery, would free Conybear, would round up Bergson, would restore him his pilfered fortune, reaction was too great. For the tall girl with the bloom of youth gone from her was not his Claire!

Mechanically he proceeded to the dining-room. Seated, he rallied himself. Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh was nothing if not open. She threw the two at each other's heads without a pretence at disguising her match-making intentions. And big, blundering Sinsabaugh, who was so clever at business but such a puppet in the hands of his butterfly wife, yielded to Madge's desire. He began telling her of his trip to Chicago, and Waring eyed the girl across the table from him. It was not Mrs. Willy's intention to make the conversation general, and though Waring could have cheerfully spanked his hostess, she was, after all, his hostess.

"You have been in New York some time, Miss Sorel?" he said.

"Not of recent years," she answered. "You see, I have been in a convent so many years, in France."

More coincidence! The Claire that Waring knew had been brought up in a French convent!

"Indeed!" said Waring.

"Yes. Had it not been for my great good fortune in meeting Mrs. Sinsabaugh, some months ago, in Paris, I should not have an acquaintance in this country."

"No relatives?"

"Distant. And not near New York."

Mrs. Willy, one ear cocked to overhear what they might say, entered into the conversation here.

"Yes, Phil. I met this dear girl at the Russian Embassy, at a tea, and she told me that she wanted to visit America—small wonder, her birthplace!—but that her uncle was definitely tied to Paris, and I told her to come over and that I would find friends for her. It shows how highly I regard you, Philip Waring, that you are the first I find for her."

The colour receded from Miss Sorel's face. Waring had come to the conclusion that her rather high colouring was not natural. Somehow, he sensed that this girl was not exactly the sort of girl that Mrs. Willy would ordi-

narily take up. Subconsciously he had come to this conclusion, influenced perhaps by the idea that she rouged quite boldly.

But he was wrong; she did not rouge. Her face was now as pale as wax. Indeed, she seemed startled and, oddly enough, a trifle younger than he had mentally put her down as being. It was as though her face, schooled to certain expressions, took on a hardness that, when she gave way to a natural emotion, vanished. At least, if it did not entirely vanish, the rigidity of expression that had made her seem—well, thirty—disappeared. She didn't look over twenty-five now, as she leaned across the table.

"I—I—I'm sorry, but—when we were introduced—I'm stupid at such things. Your name is—Philip Waring?"

"Why, yes," said Waring, surprised.

"That's funny," exclaimed Sinsabaugh. "When I told Waring your name, he acted as though I'd struck him. And now you seemed all fussed up because Phil's name is what it is."

"Yes. I thought he was named Deering," said the girl.

Mrs. Willy looked from one to the other

of them. "Well, what does it all mean?" she asked wonderingly.

But Miss Sorel had regained her self-control. "Why, did I make a display of myself? It's nothing, but—I have a very distant cousin, an Englishman, by that same name, and—I was rather startled."

The hard expression had returned to her features. In her eyes was a contemplative look; Waring had seen the same cruel contemplation in the eyes of a cat. And the girl was lying. Her explanation was so thoroughly lame that he wondered that Sinsabaugh and his wife didn't see it. But they didn't. They accepted her statement as fact.

"Well, Phil, I know that you haven't any cousin, whose name is like Miss Sorel's. Why the amazement on your part awhile ago?" Sinsabaugh felt no strain, but there was a silence and he filled it in.

"You imagine things, Billy," said Waring easily. "I wasn't amazed a bit; I was merely delighted." He smiled at Miss Sorel. "You haven't been over very long, then?"

"On the *Candric*, last week. I was to have sailed with Mrs. Sinsabaugh, but I had some

things to attend to in London for my uncle; so we thought, Mrs. Sinsabaugh and I, that perhaps it would be as well for me to sail from there. Besides, I really wanted to look around New York all by myself for a few days."

"To become acquainted with the city, of course," said Waring.

Then Mrs. Willy came to his rescue with a question as to whether or not Miss Sorel had seen something or other. Waring didn't know what it was; he didn't care. He only knew that that sixth sense that had saved him from a wild beast in Uganda, that had protected him from the knife of Carvajal yesterday, was working in his behalf again. The girl was compelled to look at Mrs. Sinsabaugh. Waring could study her. Yes, she was hard; she was no girl fresh from a convent. And there was menace about her. Waring felt his muscles grow taut. He mentally shrugged; it was a coincidence, this girl's name and her uncle's name. And there was plenty of real danger awaiting him without his borrowing imaginary troubles. He would get Mrs. Willy alone in the drawing-room later on and ask some questions.

But having come to this healthy conclusion, Waring had no opportunity to act upon it. The butler came to Sinsabaugh's side and said something softly.

"Absurd!" exclaimed Sinsabaugh. "There's some mistake."

"They are very insistent, sir," said the butler.

"What you been doing, Phil?" demanded Sinsabaugh. "Candace, here, says that two policemen, one in uniform, are in the front hall, and want to see you."

Waring was on his feet in a moment. What the police wanted with him he could not know for certain, but it undoubtedly had to do with the abduction of Burton Conybear; the abduction was known; Waring had been seen with the financier. And once in the hands of the police, Waring could be of no more aid to Claire, or to Conybear, for that matter, he was certain.

"This—this is an odd affair, Billy," he said. "Come with me, will you?"

"Surely!" Sinsabaugh was on his feet.

So too was Miss Sorel, staring wildly at Waring. But he had no time to ponder on

the meaning of her expression. He whispered swiftly to Sinsabaugh.

"Send Candace out to tell them that I'm not here; he is mistaken. Clear away my place at the table; say I haven't been here——"

"What's wrong, Phil?" demanded Sinsabaugh.

"Can't tell you now. Got to get away. Can you let me out the side door—quickly?"

"Wait here," snapped Sinsabaugh to the butler. The big man had not regained his lost fortune several times over by hemming and hawing. He was a big blunderer socially, but he was a steel trap when it came to action.

He led Waring to the side door. "Hustle," he said. "And—Phil, can't you give me a hint?"

"Not now, old man." Waring peered down the side-street. There were no policemen in sight.

"Need anything? Money—*anything*?"

"Not a thing. I'll 'phone, or something, and—Billy, if you hear anything, it's——"

"Go on, man; if it should happen to be the truth, it'll be all right, because you did it. But I've a pull in this town, Phil, and——"

He didn't finish the sentence; Waring was gone. Sinsabaugh tugged at his moustache. He returned thoughtfully to the dining-room. Rather blood-and-thunderly, this, he told himself. What the deuce had Phil been doing? But it didn't matter what; Phil Waring was his friend. He went to see the policemen in the front hall. Billy Sinsabaugh was loyal to the core.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BERGSON stared at Claire. "It is very odd to me, Mademoiselle," he said. "Cantrell and Durney have *not* been drinking."

"Of course we haven't," snapped Durney. "That's the trouble with ringing in dolls on a deal like this. They're so stuck on themselves that if they're left alone with a man, they think they're going to be made love to, and if they ain't, they think the man's crazy or drunk or something."

Bergson ignored the words. He studied the girl's face. She coloured faintly at the coarseness of Durney, and her lips tightened.

"You are not, Mademoiselle, of the steel that your uncle had led me to expect. You flinch; you trust your own judgment."

So far, Bergson had held himself in. But he could control himself no longer.

"Go upstairs, Mademoiselle. At once! Get from my sight, or——"

He mastered himself as the girl, without a

word, left the room. He leaned back in his chair.

"The papers," he said harshly.

As though a king had expressed the command, one of his satellites handed him a bundle of evening newspapers. Only Cantrell, who, with Durney, seemed a cut below the men who had come with Bergson from the Hancock Square house, dared break the silence that followed.

"It's my idea," he said heavily, "that we ought not to delay at all. We got Conybear and that bunch, and with this Waring guy around loose, the longer we delay the more dangerous it gets for us."

"You think so?" queried Bergson softly.

"Why, sure," said Cantrell. "He'll go to the police, most likely, and——"

"You were engaged by me, I believe, because you were a thoroughly unscrupulous scoundrel," said Bergson, "—not to give advice."

"Eh?" Cantrell's face shrieked amazement. "Say, look here, Mr. Bergson, no guy can talk to me this way without——"

“Well, without what?” Bergson’s mouth quivered in a smile.

Cantrell’s hands involuntarily rose as though to protect himself. He cast a glance about him; he looked pleadingly at his companion of the Camp Avenue house, Durney. But that worthy’s face was rigid.

“Say, I didn’t mean to get gay, chief,” said Cantrell whiningly.

There had been no threat uttered; but death had spread its wings over Cantrell as surely as though Bergson had held a revolver to the man’s head. And Cantrell knew it. Beads of sweat stood on his forehead.

“No?” said Bergson. “We will hear no more from you, my friend Cantrell. We will hear no advice, no objections. You will obey orders and think not at all, and talk not at all. Otherwise, my Cantrell, there will be no James Cantrell any more. Am I understood?”

He was still smiling when he opened a newspaper; but the man whom he addressed shivered involuntarily. Bergson’s smile held something icy in it, something incredibly dreadful. Cantrell would not offend in this fashion again.

A ring from the bell of the wall telephone made Bergson drop the newspaper into which he had dipped so casually, so intent, apparently, on the news, and so oblivious of all that had happened, that might be happening. At a nod from his chief, the watchful-eyed Ranney answered the call.

"Dora," he said to Bergson.

The latter's sunken eyes gleamed with a real pleasure. He walked over and took the receiver.

"Dora? . . . Yes. We have given up Camp and Hancock. . . . Danger? Well, my Dora, one expects that. . . . You telephoned both places? And there was no answer? The police, then, have not yet discovered those places. . . . To dine with the Sinsabaughs? He is well worth knowing—and cultivating, my Dora. . . . What has happened? I will see you to-night, later. There is no need for you to fret your pretty head. . . . Disarranged? Hardly that, my Dora. One Philip Waring has entered our plans, and we must find out why. It will not take long. And so—dine with the Sinsabaughs, my dear."

He rang off abruptly. One felt that as he

treated the men who followed him, so he treated this woman at the other end of the telephone; even though he spoke lightly, affectionately, his words were commands.

He resumed his chair and took up his newspaper again. Again the room was deathly still, save for the rustling of the news-sheets as Bergson's sunken eyes roamed their columns. His nostrils suddenly twitched. He reread an item.

He stared blankly at Ranney. His nostrils quivered faintly. He seemed like a hound that has scented something it cannot identify, but that instinct tells it is dangerous. He dropped the paper to the floor and slumped low in his chair; his lips moved slightly, as though to himself he recited certain facts. But if that recital brought him to any sound conclusion, it could not be read in his expression.

The door-bell rang; at a nod from Bergson, Ranney answered. He was gone but a moment, and when he returned he was preceded by Henderson, the secretary-valet of Burton Conybear.

"Well, you got him?" cried Henderson.

Bergson looked at the newcomer malignantly.

"Got whom?" he rasped.

"Waring!"

"Got him! No—you idiot!"

For a moment it seemed that the word was a fighting one. Henderson's impassive countenance flushed; but the flush passed immediately; immobile of feature, he sank into a chair and lighted a cigar. All the time he kept his eyes upon the eyes of Bergson, and it was the latter who looked away. There was the faintest touch of scorn in Henderson's eyes as Bergson fumbled with the newspaper he had been reading. And Cantrell shot a glance at Durney; that worthy, too, had observed the byplay and understood its pregnancy; he nodded almost imperceptibly at Cantrell. It was as though he agreed inaudibly to an unuttered question. And he had; as surely as though Durney and Cantrell had discussed the matter pro and con, so surely had they decided that if there were two camps in the establishment that retained them, the camp of Henderson was the stronger, and to the stronger they would attach themselves.

Even Ranney, ablest of those devoted followers of Bergson now present, stirred uneasily. Something was afoot; Henderson had said nothing in reply to Bergson's angry ob-
jurgation; Henderson took Bergson's wrath silently; and yet there was something in Henderson's manner, his cool lighting of a cigar, that stirred Ranney's resentment and aroused something else: a vague fear.

But Ranney forgot this as Bergson, lifting his eyes from his newspaper again, glared furiously at Conybear's erstwhile secretary. To Cantrell and Durney, less able than Ranney, but more cunning, it was obvious that Bergson was attempting to convince himself by his browbeating manner, but to Ranney, Bergson's speech served as dissipation of the former's doubts.

"Why didn't you tell me in the first place that the police knew of our plans?" demanded Bergson.

"I thought I'd thrown dust in their eyes," answered Henderson.

"You *thought*——" Sheer disgust, apparently, stopped Bergson. "Had I known that

the men who were to surround me were such——”

He stopped again, for the telephone was ringing. He waved Ranney aside and answered it himself.

“Bostwick? Well? . . . A Jap servant? Yes. . . . Do? Stay there, you fool, until Waring comes!”

He rang off and returned to his seat. “This Waring—Philip Waring, you said his name was—Bostwick telephones me from near his apartment. He and Velie went there. They looked him up in the telephone-book. There were two or three Philip Warings, but they think they located the right man. I know they did. He was not at home. His Japanese servant admitted them. They questioned him. Waring had not been home all night. The servant grew suspicious; he will not be suspicious again—for some time to come. They are there now. If Waring enters——”

“You say you *know* they have the right Waring? How do you know?”

“There was a man named Carey Haig,” said Bergson. “When he—died, there was newspaper talk. The name of one Philip

Waring was mentioned, I believe. Waring suffered by Haig's—misfortune. He lived on Twenty-eighth Street, I believe. I did not send word to Bostwick directly, or I should have told him that address. As it is—he lost no time."

Henderson's lips pursed. "The Waring that lost by Haig's death? And he came from 17 Hancock Place? Then he has been following you."

"Absurd! How could he know? He told you that he came *from* 17 Hancock Place. . . . I do not understand it. . . . You, Henderson—what did you say to him?"

"I've told you that over the 'phone already," said Henderson. "I told him that he was not to notify the police, but to go at once to Camp Avenue. Then I 'phoned you; I 'phoned Camp Avenue; the girl answered and said that she would prepare Cantrell and Durney for Waring's coming. Then I left Portsmouth. Near Camp Avenue, I took the precaution of 'phoning Number 88 again. There was no answer, and I feared things had gone wrong. So I came here."

"And things *have* gone wrong," cried Berg-

son. "Waring went to Camp Avenue; Carvajal followed him; Carvajal had seen him near our Hancock Place house and was suspicious of him. But Waring did not enter; perhaps he knew that Carvajal followed him. He eluded Carvajal, and Carvajal entered the house to make inquiries. Claire revealed to him that it was a house of the Society——"

"But if Waring came *near* the house, why weren't Durney and Cantrell——"

"Claire did not tell them; she claimed they had been drinking and that she was afraid of them."

Henderson shot glances of rage at the luckless Cantrell and Durney.

"But Claire lied," said Bergson. "She—she—her uncle—he vouched for her—I can trust no one!"

"You seem to trust this Carvajal, all right," said Henderson. "Who is he? What is he? Where is he?"

"Where? He is in search of Waring. But he doesn't know the city, and so is slower to reach Waring's address than Bostwick."

"Who is he?"

"Randall sent him from Paris. He is

French. He came on the *Montania*. He is of the right stamp. I sent him to the bank with Conybear. He did well. And he is not the sort who hesitates. If he can get near Waring——”

Once again the telephone rang, and once again the nervous Bergson answered it himself.

“Dora? *What?*” His voice rose in a scream. “Do? Do? Do anything! What do I care——” He rang off.

“Well?” Henderson’s voice was cold.

Bergson threw himself into his chair.

“There is no one—no one—with brains—or daring. Dora is at the Sinsabaughs’—the William Sinsabaughs’—dining. Waring has been there.”

“Waring!” Henderson gasped.

“And the police came there; they want him—on a charge of murder!”

It was Henderson’s turn to lose his calm. “What do you mean?”

“What I have said. There is in this evening’s paper an account of the killing of a foreigner—a Frenchman—by an automobile in front of Waring’s apartment. It must have

something to do with that. . . . But he was there—in the same room with Dora—and she let him go!”

“Well, if he’s dodging the police—*did* he make a get-away?”

“Yes, but——”

“Then we haven’t to worry about him this moment,” declared Henderson. “We’ve enough to do worrying about Conybear and——”

“Which means this Waring,” cried Bergson. “For if he knew that Conybear was our prisoner—and he told you that he came *from* Hancock Place. That sounds as though he had been *in* the house.”

“How could he? The police are after him, and he’s dodging them, so he won’t——”

“Yet to know at all about me, he must have been studying, searching, ever since Carey Haig——”

His voice died away, as his eyes fascinatedly stared at the newspaper before him. When he spoke again it was chokily.

“Listen, my friends, to this headline: ‘Dubuque importer would teach New Yorkers styles. Jacques Pelletier returns from Paris

and stops on way to Iowa to tell New York how to dress.' ”

“Well?” prompted Henderson.

“Raoul Carvajal,” said Bergson softly, ‘who brought me a letter from Peter Randall—Raoul Carvajal told me that he crossed the Atlantic, on the *Montania*, under the name of Jacques Pelletier. And this newspaper says that Jacques Pelletier arrived from his annual trip abroad on the *Montania*!’”

Henderson wet his lips. “You mean——”

“Could two men of the same name and address have crossed on the same boat? Does it sound possible? And a Frenchman is killed in front of Waring’s apartment. And Carvajal arrives at Hancock Place. And *from* Hancock Place, Philip Waring goes to the telephone to inform you, Henderson, that Conybear is a captive.”

“But this Carvajal helped get money from the bank; he was one of Conybear’s guards,” gasped Henderson.

Bergson’s hands went above his head. “Unreasonable, yes, but—what would you? In what other way——”

"You mean that your Carvajal is Waring?"

Cantrell and Durney wavered in their unspoken allegiance to Henderson. For it was Bergson whose mind worked quickly, whose voice rang firmly, whose manner spoke of command.

"Ranney, go at once to the Plutonia. It was there that Carvajal said that he would register. I ordered him there. Take Cantrell and Durney. Go—at once."

Cantrell and Durney hesitated, but only for a moment. Henderson said nothing until after they had departed. Then he spoke.

"But if—if Carvajal and Waring are the same—will he go to the Plutonia? Will he be such a fool as to——"

"My friend,"—and Bergson was frankly in the saddle of command again,—"he has been fool enough to pit himself against the Society once; he was fool enough to pretend to become one of us; he was fool enough to telephone you and give his name. He will be fool enough to go to the Plutonia."

"And then?"

Bergson shrugged his shoulders. "It was

you, Henderson, who had me engage Cantrell and Durney. Murder was their trade, you said. And Ranney does not fear the sight of blood. . . . One cannot be a fool too often, my Henderson, without paying the price of foolishness."

All his confidence seemed restored.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE Third Avenue elevated deposited Waring at Fourteenth Street. He walked slowly westward to the subway. He had not been seen leaving the side door of the Sinsabaugh mansion; that much he knew. So, for a few moments, there had been time to think, to plan.

But what was there to plan? If the police had traced him to the home of Sinsabaugh,—and he hoped that the railroad man would get into no trouble through aiding in his escape,—then the police by this time must have effected an entrance to his apartment, must be lying in wait for him there. There must be a great many detectives upon his trail for two policemen to have traced him to the Sinsabaugh home. It was hardly credible that a detective, in search of Waring, had seen Waring upon the street and followed him to Sinsabaugh's. Had that been so, there would undoubtedly have been no delay in an arrest. Therefore—

well, there were his clubs. The police evidently knew of Conybear's abduction; he (Waring) had been seen with Conybear; the dragnet had been cast; Waring's rooms and clubs had been visited. But he had been over all that several times already, and had each time come to the same conclusion: that it was not safe for him to go any place where he was known. It would not even do to telephone his apartment.

In common with most other people, Waring, while he openly jeered at the intelligence of the police, had really an absurd respect for its powers. Those powers had just been manifested; he had been traced to the Sinsabaugh home. If he telephoned his own apartment, it was within the bounds of reason that a detective would greet him as he stepped from the telephone-booth. And though he did wish he could warn Mike, there was really nothing about which to warn his valet. Hitherto his reason for wishing to speak with Mike had been to tell Mike not to be alarmed, not to tell the police that his master was missing. But as the police already knew that, and had probably interviewed Mike by this time—

He must go to the Plutonia and register as Jacques Pelletier, and await some word from Bergson that would bring him to Claire once more—his Claire, not the Claire Sorel whom he had just unceremoniously left, and who was— He shook his head; mystery piled upon mystery. Still this latter mystery, this oddity of there being two girls with the same given name, and with uncles who were apparently one and the same person, was a mystery that would be cleared up in two minutes' conversation with his Claire. *His* Claire! He coloured faintly as he entered the subway.

At Fifty-ninth Street he turned east. A little below that cross-town artery, on Fifth Avenue, stands the Plutonia. It is not a big hotel, as modern hotels go, and it is not so luxurious as some of the later ones. But fashion still clings to it, and Waring entered its doors with some slight trepidation. Though it was well past the dinner-hour now, some one who knew him might see him. Well, the fact that the police "wanted" him was not common property yet, although it might be to-morrow. He shook off the slight air of furtiveness and went

directly to the desk. He registered as "Jacques Pelletier, Dubuque, Iowa."

No, he had no baggage with him; there had been some delay and mistake on the trains. He would, however, pay in advance, and on the morrow. . . . Quite so. . . . The clerk was most courteous. Waring was assigned to a room on the fourth floor.

As he followed the bellboy from the desk, a man bowed to him. Short, thick-set, sullen-mouthed and surly-eyed—since Carey Haig had died, Waring had seen many men like this in the offices of the detective agency he had employed. "Plain-clothes-man" was written all over the man. The house detective, probably—a police officer graduated into private work.

Waring stared at the man. He could not remember ever having seen this particular specimen of the genus *scut* before. But the man evidently knew him! Waring looked through the man unrecognisingly. The man, who had started forward as though to speak, flushed and stepped aside. Waring, entering the elevator, glanced over his shoulder; the man was looking at the register.

In his room Waring considered this new complication. To-morrow morning even the newspapers, doubtless, would know that Philip Waring was wanted by the police. He had thought that registering under a false name would securely protect him from discovery for a while. But the morning papers— There was one sheet, devoted to racing and theatricals, that was issued at midnight. Trust an explain-clothes-man to follow racing! In a few hours, then, this man downstairs, if he knew Waring's name, would know where the object of a police search was stopping.

Waring paced up and down the room. If he left here, he would escape any unpleasant results of the recognition by the house detectives. But also he would cut himself off from communication with Bergson.

He stood by the window, peering down the Avenue. He wondered if any of the limousines that passed held persons as beset by circumstance as he. Were there other mysteries, as complex, as fraught with menace, threatening other dwellers in this city? He shrugged his shoulders. Impossible! He turned back from the window just as the door of his room

opened. Through it stepped the stocky man who had bowed to him downstairs.

He looked at Waring with a knowing leer. He closed the door carefully behind him.

"Well, what's the little game, Mr. Waring?" he asked.

"My name is Pelletier," said Waring. "Will you kindly explain just what this——"

"Easy's the word, sir," grinned the man. "This is a high-class hotel, Mr. Waring, and the funny stuff don't get a laugh here. What's the answer? Why the Pelletier and the Dubuque stuff? Why, say, you got a fine chance passing for a French hick from I-o-way, now, ain't you? Dolled up like you never got off the Big Alley in your life, too? Rather coarse work, I call it."

"So? Will you leave quietly, or must I ring for some one to throw you out?" demanded Waring.

He moved toward the telephone as he spoke. But the thick-set man laughed unpleasantly.

"Never mind the bluff," he counselled. "I'm the house detective here, Mr. Waring. If anybody's thrown out, it'll be you. But I ain't a crab. I don't plan to spoil a gentleman's nice

time, supposin' he's not a piker. Where's the lady?"

"Lady?" But Waring's indignant surprise served only to amuse the house detective.

"You heard me. 'Lady,' I said. I'll say it again if you want me to. But you don't want me to, do you? Course not. Well, then, suppose you write me a little check, Mr. Waring. Oh, no, I'm not a bit afraid you'll stop it, or do anything unpleasant. And I think I'm quite generous not demanding cash. But, of course, on this kind of a little party, a gent needs all the spot cash he's got with him. A check for a hundred, Mr. Waring. What say?"

Waring sat down; he lighted a cigarette. He eyed, speculatively, the man leaning against the door. He had been recognised, yes; but he was in no immediate danger. It served as a distraction from the major perils that surrounded him, to listen to this minor affair.

"Would you mind telling me just exactly what *your* little game is?" he asked, quietly.

"That's reasonable enough," said the intruder. "Well, listen: here's me, Dan Grim-

fel, house detective of the Plutonia. But I used to be with the Greenhams, and it happens that I was with them not so very long ago—recent enough for me to remember that the Greenhams was doing a little job for a Mr. Philip Waring. Never noticed the stenographer in the outer reception-room of the Greenhams, did you, Mr. Waring? Nice little doll, and you might've noticed her, at that. No? Well, she noticed you, all right. Pointed you out to me one day and mentioned your name. And while I ain't a camera-eye, maybe, still, I don't forget a Mr. Philip Waring, *the* Mr. Philip Waring, when I see him, even if I ain't assigned to the job he's given my boss."

He paused a moment. "Simple enough, ain't it?" he asked.

"Why, I think I'm beginning to see," said Waring.

"Sure you do. Soon's I spotted you, I recognised you. And I nodded to you just because it don't do me no harm to have a big bowin'-list. Likewise, the office force downstairs gives me credit for the good memory. Well, I don't make *many* mistakes, and when

I looked at the name you'd written in the register, I knew I hadn't gone wrong this time."

"Yes? Is Jacques Pelletier so much like Philip Waring?" said Waring, a jeer in his voice.

"You ain't read the afternoon papers *very* close, have you? No? Well, I have. And there's an interview in one of them with a Mr. Jacques Pelletier, of Dubuque, Iowa, and he ain't stoppin' at *this* hotel, either. Well, mistakes happen, you know; accidents are common. But I called up Pelletier's hotel and got him on the wire. Soon's I got him and he said who he was, I rang off. I'd found out enough. There wasn't two Pelletiers from Dubuque. What's the joke?" he demanded.

Waring was smiling somewhat ruefully. He wished he could solve the mystery of persons similarly named as quickly as Grimfel had solved this affair.

"Nothing; you interest me; go on," said Waring.

"Go on? Why, there ain't much more to say. You'd picked a phony name; *why* you picked that particular name I don't know and don't care. 'Live and Let Live,' is my motto

—if I get something to live on. You was Waring, all right, and men don't register under false names unless they got something to hide. Comin' here without baggage and all—well, something to hide usually wears petticoats. Do I get the check?"

Waring had done, in the past day or two, things that, a week ago, he would have thought impossible; he had in various ways helped to outrage the law; but submitting to blackmail was a cut beyond his endurance. He held himself in hand, however.

"Not admitting for a moment that you are right in this matter of identity—why the lady part of it?" he asked.

Grimfel winked wisely. "Well, when a man that I know ain't a 'gun' registers under a phony name without baggage, even if he *does* pay in advance——"

"And if I give you my solemn word of honor that a lady is not concerned in the matter?"

"Sure; I'll believe you; but I'll take your check just the same and—word of honor!" He held out his hand to Waring. "The check, please," he said.

And then—

Waring looked at the girl whose pressure upon the door had caused Grimfel to step aside. Pale, breathing heavily, she leaned against the wall. It was Claire, *his* Claire. She did not speak—merely looked from Waring to the house detective. The latter coloured faintly under her glance but still held out his hand.

“Will you wait?” snapped Waring. “I will send you——”

“I’ll ring the office, and there’ll be a nice scandal in the mornin’ papers,” jeered Grimfel. “Come through!”

Waring turned to the girl. “This man—misunderstands——”

Her heavy breathing had subsided a trifle. “Never mind—him. Let—us—go——”

“Nothin’ doin’,” said Grimfel. “You’ll pay, or——”

Waring silenced the girl with a gesture. “Have you a blank check?” he asked the detective.

“You bet—and a fountain pen.” Grimfel gave both to Waring. The latter walked to a desk and wrote a check for the amount Grimfel named. He gave it to the man. Grimfel

folded it and placed it in an inside pocket. He walked to the door, where he stopped a minute.

"I can see," he said, "why you didn't notice the little stenographer."

Waring made no answer, and Grimfel closed the door behind him. Waring locked it. He turned to the girl questioningly.

"Who was that man?" she asked.

"The house detective, a—an unclean person. He——" But he did not have to explain to her; a slight colour was visible, suddenly, against the pallor of her cheek.

"Then he does not know about——" she began, slightly relieved.

"The matters we know of?" Waring shook his head. "But tell me——"

She interrupted him. "Come, at once! They will be here——"

"Who?"

"Bergson knows that you—are not Carvajal. In a room over him, I could hear him telling the others—he sent them here—to kill you. He knows that you are Philip Waring, and——"

"But how did you get here?"

“He didn’t think of me—no one noticed—as I crept downstairs. I got a taxicab—it’s at the side entrance. If we hurry, they may not miss me. We might get back there—with the police—before Bergson knows——”

Waring saw the point. A surprise capture, before Conybear could be injured. . . . They stepped into the hall together.

“You—you’re a wonder,” he told her. “But how did you know my room?”

“I registered; I saw the name Jacques Pelletier—that, I knew, was the name you were to use. I got a room on your floor and—here, this elevator.”

They descended. Through a narrow hall—from which opened parlours that would be filled a little later when ladies, returning from the theatre, paused to arrange their hair before supper—they passed, to come out upon the street through an inconspicuous door.

“He’s waiting—the taxi,” said the girl. “We can go right to the nearest police-station, and——”

Her words were lost to Waring in the roar that came from the engine as the chauffeur cranked the car. He handed her in, and still

the engine's roaring made him miss her next words. He knew that she spoke, but that was all. He thrust his head through the door.

"Did you ask someth——" he began. But he did not finish the question. He felt suddenly sick and limp, and his head seemed very large, so large that it filled the whole taxicab, would burst it in another moment, he was certain. He felt hands drag him into the interior of the machine; he felt the machine start; he wondered what had happened. Then he knew: he had been struck a heavy blow on the head; Claire, *his* Claire, had inveigled him into the taxi. . . . No, he wouldn't believe that; he'd ask her; she'd tell him that it wasn't so. . . . He lost consciousness.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE telephone in his bedroom awoke Commissioner Herkomer from a restless sleep. He had not retired until two o'clock, and at the time of retiring he was no nearer the solution of the kidnapping mysteries than when Peter Perkins had first brought him the note signed by Burton Conybear. Samuel Balch, Waring's attorney, had been unable to give any information about Waring that would explain the latter's apparent dealings with Conybear. True, Waring owned a bit of real estate, but he would hardly have mortgaged that without asking Balch's assistance in drawing the papers, and such assistance had not been asked.

Henderson, Conybear's private secretary, had not returned to Portsmouth, and could not be located in town. And there was no further news of Prendergast, Larned, Mikells and Clurg, the other missing financiers.

Fortunately the newspapers had learned nothing of the affair; at least, the first editions

that Herkomer had scanned at Headquarters at a quarter of two that morning held nothing about the matter. And Herkomer's late presence at his office had been accounted for, to the reporters' satisfaction, by the spectacular raid, headed by Lieutenant Dan McGaw of the strong-arm squad, upon Tex Granville's gambling-house.

Herkomer had gone to bed with the scant satisfaction that, although he was facing a turning-point in his ambitious career, the press and public knew nothing of it—yet.

But now—this morning. . . . In the short space of time it took for him to reach over and grasp the telephone, Herkomer reviewed all that had happened since Peter Perkins brought him the creased and wrinkled note. And though the lightning review brought him dismay, his voice was alert and crisp as he asked who called.

“It's Kelcey speakin', Commissioner. Legay and Dibblee are dead.”

Herkomer swung his legs out of bed. “What?”

“Yes, sir.” Kelcey's voice held a mixture

of excitement and regret. "And Waring's Jap servant, too."

"Then they got Waring?"

"No, sir. You know Legay and Dibblee was sent to Waring's apartment, sir. Well, I got down here to Headquarters an hour ago, and no report had come in from them during the night. I thought that was funny, so I telephoned the Thirtieth Street 'House,' that bein' the nearest station, and told 'em to rush a man over to give Waring's place the once-over. Well, Commissioner, he got the janitor to let him in, and he finds a Jap—the janitor said it was Waring's servant—and Legay and Dibblee, dead. Knifed. The whole three of 'em. No weapons found on any of 'em. Janitor don't know nothin' about it. Havin' him brought to Headquarters, but the man that went over from the 'House' says he's ignorant of anything. He 'phoned that he's bringin' him in, though."

"Right. I'll be down as soon as I've had a bite——"

"Somethin' else, Commissioner," said Kelcey quickly. "Though the janitor of Waring's place don't seem to know anythin', the hallboy

of the apartment across the street does—the night boy. He didn't get off duty until eight this mornin', and he saw the ambulance that was sent over from the hospital, and he crossed over, and——”

“Get to it, Kelcey,” admonished Herkomer impatiently.

“Well, sir, seems like the boy was smokin' a cigarette on the street last night and he saw Dibblee and Legay sort of hangin' around. He lives near Dibblee, though he don't know him to speak to, and knew he was on the Force, so he was kinda interested. Well, while they was hangin' round, along came a couple of men and entered the building. The boy says that in about five minutes Dibblee and Legay crossed over after them, and from where he was standin' he could see that Dibblee was ringin' a bell. Then they went in and he could still see them enter the door of a ground-floor apartment—that's Waring's. And he says he's dead sure them other two men went in the same apartment after ringin' the bell. And the other apartments in the building have been visited already, and none of

the tenants will admit having four men, or two men visit 'em last evenin', and——”

“Well, well?” snapped Herkomer.

“Why, the boy knows Waring by sight, and he says that neither of the first two men was him. And he says that the first two come out in about ten minutes and walked away swift, scared-like. That's all, sir. Nothin' else has come up.”

Well, it was enough, mused Herkomer as he swiftly dressed. Two policemen and Waring's servant—murdered! And on the hasty evidence thus far gathered, not murdered by Waring. But Waring was one, and only one certainly, of a gang. Still, why should that gang wish to kill Waring's servant? He shook his head despairingly. The answer to this question and to many others—well, he prayed that they would come. But they would not come to him while he sprawled in bed. He dressed swiftly and breakfasted at a rate that made his motherly old housekeeper shake her head mournfully and utter prognostications that contained references to her late lamented husband, who had dug his grave with his teeth.

The telephone rang again as he was leaving the house, and he turned back impatiently.

"Kelcey talkin', Commissioner."

"I'm on my way downtown now," said Herkomer.

"Don't, sir. There's somethin' new come up. The Traders' Loan just telephoned, sir. A check was just presented for cashing there. It was dated yesterday, and was for a hundred dollars."

"Are they holding the man?" cried Herkomer.

"We hadn't told them to, sir," Kelcey defended himself. "Your orders was simply to round up Waring's bank-account and tell the bank to notify us if a check from him went through, and to hold Waring himself on some pretext or other."

Kelcey was right. A bank wouldn't hold a person who simply presented a check, without some definite reason therefor, and Herkomer had not felt like giving definite reasons just now. Waring himself—that was different. Waring's bank had been informed that the Police Department would stand behind it.

"But it don't make no difference, Commis-

sioner," shouted Kelcey. His desire for the dramatic had made him save his climax. "The paying-teller was no boob. The check was a blank of another bank, with the Traders' Loan's name written in. And while the check was made out to 'cash,' the teller hemmed and hawed and said this was a bit unusual, and—well, anyway, he got the guy to write his name on it, and then he 'phoned the bank whose name was scratched out, and—why, *I* know the guy who presented it, Dan Grimfel. And the paying-teller didn't have to tell me where he worked, neither. He's house detective at the Plutonia, and a fine second-story-man he is, too. The Greenhams wouldn't stand for some of the coarse stuff he pulled, and how he landed the job he's got is a mystery to me. Anyway, Commissioner, it looks like he seen Waring last night, and if he did——"

"And you think he's at the Plutonia now?"

"I made sure of that before I 'phoned you, sir. I telephoned the hotel, and he got in just as I was talkin' to the clerk. I got him on the wire, and I told him that Commissioner Herkomer would be wantin' to see him, and for

him to hang around until he heard from me again."

"But he may take alarm, and——"

Kelcey guffawed. "I *know* that bird, Commissioner. He's as crooked as a ram's horn, and yellower than a canary! Run? *Him*? Say, he's sweatin' blood now if he done anythin' wrong, and too scared to move. He'll be waitin' for you, Commissioner."

Herkomer hung up—fairly ran to the car awaiting him.

It was a very nervous Dan Grimfel, somewhat different from the blustering blackmailer that had talked with Phil Waring, who met Commissioner Herkomer at the desk of the Plutonia. Herkomer did not have to ask for the man. Grimfel approached, saluting clumsily, before the Commissioner could speak to the clerk.

"You wanted a little talk with me, Commissioner?" said Grimfel.

"You're Grimfel, eh? The man that cashed a check drawn by Philip Waring, this morning?"

"Sh-sh!" Grimfel's eyes pleaded. The curious clerk, recognising Herkomer,—the

Commissioner was no stranger to the hotel,—drew a little nearer. “Couldn’t you come down to the grill, Commissioner? There’s nobody there this time o’ mornin’.”

Herkomer nodded. He had no particular desire to have his conversation overheard.

“Well?” he said as with the house detective he sat down at a table in the grill-room. He waved away a hovering waiter.

“Y’see, Commissioner,” began Grimfel, “they’re a nosy bunch up at the desk, and I thought maybe you might have somethin’ private——”

“I have. When did Waring give you that check?”

Grimfel was of the evasive kind, the kind that believes that words hide meaning. But he could not be a house detective in a hotel like the Plutonia without gathering unto himself some slight knowledge of human nature. He saw that Herkomer was in no mood to be trifled with. And yet he could not for the life of him see why the Commissioner of Police should take an interest in the check given to a house detective by a “swell young plute,” as Grimfel inwardly denominated Waring. Un-

less Waring had told the police that he had been blackmailed! But that wasn't probable; the Police Commissioner himself would hardly handle personally a case of blackmail. Grimfel could think rapidly enough. He would be wise not to give himself away until he had to.

"Why, he gave it to me last night, Commissioner," answered the house detective easily.

"What time last night?" asked Herkomer.

"Oh, I guess it was about nine o'clock."

"And what did Waring give you the check for?"

"Well,"—Grimfel shrugged his shoulders and nodded his head from side to side,—“I ain't on trial, am I, Commissioner?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Herkomer.

"Why, Commissioner, there ain't any harm in a couple of gentlemen makin' a harmless little bet with each other, is there?"

"Not at all, Grimfel. That's how it happened, eh?"

"Yes, sir." He eyed the Commissioner with veiled contempt. For Herkomer was rising from the table as though satisfied.

"That all, Commissioner?" questioned Grimfel.

"Yes—here," replied Herkomer. "But I want you to ride downtown with me."

"Eh? But I got my job here, Commissioner."

"Not any more, Grimfel," said Herkomer very kindly. "There's a nice little cell down at Headquarters where you belong. Come on!"

His voice was suddenly crisp and hard. Grimfel stared at him. But Herkomer smiled.

"You see, Grimfel, it's very important to me that I acquire all the information about Philip Waring that it's possible for me to acquire. And I must acquire it in about five minutes—five seconds, if possible. You're in a mood to lie, Grimfel; I'm in the mood to hear the truth. I won't change my mood; a cell may change yours. Come on!"

But Kelcey knew the Grimfel character, and had not erred in his description thereof. Grimfel seemed physically to curl up.

"Sit down, Commissioner," he said huskily.

He had been fooled; Herkomer had not been fooled.

And Grimfel told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Herkomer listened. The contempt that he felt for Grimfel at the latter's recital he hid. A man low enough to commit blackmail is low enough to be immune to contempt; why waste it on him?

"You'd better stay around here; I may want you," was all his response to Grimfel's story. Then he went upstairs and telephoned Kelcey to come at once to the Plutonia. That matter attended to, and fortified by Kelcey's assurance that he would be at the hotel as soon as the swiftest police automobile could convey him there, Herkomer turned his attention to the register, the clerk offering no objection.

He found the name "Jacques Pelletier." There was no question in Herkomer's mind as to the truth of Grimfel's story. A man does not confess blackmail unless he is telling the truth. "Jacques Pelletier" was Philip Waring. And Grimfel had said that the girl whom he had seen in Waring's room had registered under the name of "Doris Marchant."

Little as one man may know of another's

life, especially when the two are not intimates, not acquaintances even, Herkomer knew enough of Philip Waring to be quite certain that this was no vulgar intrigue in which Waring had been caught by Grimfel. It stood to reason that a man playing the desperate game that Waring was playing, a game in which millionaires had been kidnapped and policemen and a Jap servant murdered, would not be indulging in liaisons at the very moment when his crimes were nearing their climaxes. Of course, men differ. But Waring's sort of man runs pretty closely to form. True, Waring was not running true to form in what he had been doing lately, but still—all the more proof that Grimfel had erred in his estimate of the situation. For Waring belonged to the second class of criminals, the class that lead blameless lives until the grand *coup* is ready for execution. Such a criminal, brainy, an artist, would not be mixed up in a sordid affair of petticoats at this time.

Then why the girl? She was no longer in the hotel. That much Grimfel had told him, and he verified this by asking the clerk. She had brought no baggage, stating, as she reg-

istered,—she had paid in advance for her room,—that her baggage and her maid would be along in an hour or so.

The night room-clerk was not on duty, but he had told his relief this much. The Plutonia was not modern enough to have floor-clerks,—which accounted for Claire's ability to proceed unquestioned to Waring's room,—but like all hotels it was suspicious of pretty girls, unattended, whose baggage does not arrive on schedule. Hence "Miss Doris Marchant" had been telephoned. No answer coming from her room, a clerk had gone up there, unlocked the door and found her gone. And a porter had seen a young lady answering to "Miss Marchant's" description leave the hotel with a gentleman who answered to the description of "Jacques Pelletier."

The clerk winked at Herkomer. "Two of 'em—both without baggage—changed their minds about staying here. That's all."

Herkomer heard the man but did not heed him. If Waring had had a "date" with a girl, neither he nor the girl would have gone to quite such roundabout methods of keeping it. Hotel parlours—there were a hundred semi-

private places where a couple might meet. And according to what the porter who had seen the couple leave had told the night-clerk, Waring and the girl had left the Plutonia within ten minutes after the girl had registered. The girl, then, had come for Waring. But why hadn't she telephoned? He shrugged his shoulders. That was unimportant. The point was: she had taken Waring away with her. Where had she taken him?

Kelcey arrived as Herkomer reached this question. Swiftly the Commissioner told what he had learned.

"Well, there's a taxi-starter," suggested the sergeant.

Herkomer nodded. He turned to the desk, behind which now stood the manager of the hotel, anxious for his hostelry's reputation. He mentioned his private office, and Herkomer allowed himself to be led there, followed by Kelcey. There was no necessity for taking the manager into his confidence, and the Commissioner did not do so. He merely stated that he wished to learn where the two fleeing guests of the hotel had gone to. The taxi-starter had a room in the servants' quarter of

the hotel. He came down, bristly as to beard and dulled as to eye, but able and willing to tell what he knew of the departure of Waring and the girl.

"They stepped into a taxi like they was in a hurry," he said, "and the taxi went off. That's all there was."

"Did you hear the address they gave?"

The starter shook his head. "I don't believe they gave any. The lady said something, and the gent stuck his head in the door, and then he climbed in the rest of the way and the car started."

"H'm! Left instructions before she entered the hotel. That proves that it wasn't a 'date.' She came to get him," mused Herkomer, aloud.

"Who drove the taxi? Happen to recognise him?" asked Kelcey.

But it was Herkomer who caught the shifty glint in the starter's eye, the too-honest bluntness of his voice.

"No, sir; some one was coming out the door, a guest, sir, and I turned to him to ask if he wanted a taxi, sir."

"A guest, eh? You mean a person that lives here?"

"Why—er—yes—no, sir."

"You're not sure?" queried Herkomer in the same kindly voice that he had used when questioning Grimfel. Herkomer *was* kindly, as the Force knew, but he hated a liar.

"Why, why, yes, sir, I *am* sure. It wasn't a person that lives here. He'd just been dining here."

"But as I understood it, he left through the door that is nearest the reception parlours. Quite a distance from the restaurant, isn't it?"

"Well, maybe he was lookin' for a lady. How do I know?" replied the starter.

His tone was sulky now, and a man telling the truth would have had no reason for sulki-ness.

"How much did some one give you to tell this story?" asked Herkomer.

"How much—say, what d'ye think I am?"

"A liar!" snapped Herkomer. "Out with it, now! As if a starter wouldn't make it his business to know a regular guest when he saw one! And you weren't sure. Out with it!"

Authority works marvels. The taxi-starter

could have blustered and bluffed a civilian, even as Dan Grimfel could have done. But behind Herkomer was the majesty of the law, with all its vague, mysterious threats.

"Come, I'm in a hurry," insisted Herkomer. And as Grimfel had yielded, so this man yielded.

"Well, I didn't know there was anything in it, or——"

"We won't bother with the excuses, please," said Herkomer.

"Well," the starter gulped, "it was like I said. The lady and gent got into a taxi, only—it wasn't the one that the lady had drove up in and that she'd told to wait. Just as she went into the hotel, three men stepped out of a taxi that had followed hers to the curb. One of them spoke to the chauffeur that had driven the lady and handed him something, and the chauffeur cranked up and drove off. The other machine moved up a little, and the guy that had been talkin' with the chauffeur noticed me lookin' on, kind of curious, and he come up to me and he says: 'Playin' a little joke, Starter. Buy yourself a smoke. And

talkin' is mighty unhealthy,' he says. And he slipped me twenty; so——”

“And who was the first chauffeur? Did you recognise him—the one that drove the lady here?”

The starter was thoroughly cowed and truthful. “Yes, sir,” he answered meekly. “His name was Monte Messerman, sir.”

“That’s all,” said Herkomer. The man left, with a sidelong glance at the hard face of the manager.

Herkomer waited until the man had gone. Then: “I wouldn’t discharge the man,” he said. “Twenty dollars is a lot of money, sometimes.”

The manager nodded. Far be it from him to refuse a minor request from the Commissioner of Police! Herkomer turned to Kelsey.

“Anybody with you?”

“Brought a couple of men, sir,” the sergeant replied.

“Well, have them look up Jacques Pelletier at the Anson. There should be some reason for Waring’s taking that name and that address—Dubuque. Find out. Look up this

Monte Messerman. Find out where he picked up the girl before bringing her here."

"Yes, sir. And are you going to Headquarters, sir?"

Herkomer shook his head. "I'm going to call on Sinsabaugh. It seems to me that he may be able to give me some information."

He spoke to the manager, who had drawn apart, beyond earshot.

"It's hardly necessary to tell you that what you've overheard this morning is to be kept quiet?"

"I have my hotel to think of, sir," was the reply. "I am not anxious for newspaper notoriety. My guests are not the sort that——"

"Quite so," agreed Herkomer. He nodded and left the office with Kelcey.

A page passed by, droning: "Tel'phone for Mr. Herk'mer, Mr. Herk'mer on the 'phone."

Herkomer stopped the boy and verified his hearing. The telephone was for him. He went to a booth, wonderingly. It was Malcolm, president of the Seventy-third National Bank; and his voice was the voice of a man in agony.

“Herkomer? Thank God! I had the devil’s own time getting your damned Headquarters to tell me where you were, but now——”

Herkomer heard a gusty sigh of relief. It was so different from what might have been expected from the suave and debonair Malcolm that he was shocked.

“What’s wrong?” he demanded.

“You haven’t seen a ticker? It’s hardly time for the papers to have it, though they will in a minute or two.”

“Have what?”

“The news of what’s going on in Wall Street, in Boston, in Philadelphia—all over the country!”

“*What?*” roared Herkomer.

“The worst bear market in history. Worse than when the Great War broke out. Everything being thrown overboard! By God, they’re crying the first extras now! It means ruin, ruin for the whole country, Herkomer, unless——”

“Pull yourself together, Malcolm,” advised Herkomer. “What can I do?”

"Do? You can find Burton Conybear, if you're anything at all of a Commissioner!"

"*Find him?*" So the cat was out of the bag already! "Why—where is he?"

"That's for you to find out! But I've heard that he's kidnapped, and if he is, I want to know it, for—my God, Herkomer, he got over fifty millions out of my vaults this morning, and—there's the biggest panic on record. And a banker I know out on Long Island just telephoned that he'd seen a letter written by Conybear saying that he was kidnapped, and——"

"He *saw* it?" cried Herkomer.

"Well, he heard of it, and didn't take any stock in it until a few minutes ago when he got news of the panic, and—what are you going to do, Herkomer?"

"I'm coming down to see you—at once," was the Commissioner's reply. "And in the meantime—keep—your—mouth—shut!"

Strong language to use to a decent chap like Malcolm, but necessary, thought Herkomer. He told Kelcey to report to him at Headquarters as soon as possible, and ran out to his car. For the moment he forgot about Sin-sabaugh.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A POLICEMAN peremptorily stopped Herkomer at Twenty-third Street.

"I s'pose you think forty miles is crawlin', doncha?" he asked. Then his jaw dropped as he recognised the Commissioner. "Scuse me, sir," he began. "I didn't know——"

"Jump in here," Herkomer cut him short. "I don't want any other fools holding me up. Not that you didn't do your duty," he added hastily as the officer flushed at the epithet. "It's all right; jump in."

Hereafter, nearsighted policemen, not recognising their chief and not granting him the right of way over all traffic, would yield to the blue uniform of the traffic-officer. As for the cross-town corner whence Herkomer had dragged the guardian of the law—well, Twenty-third Street must look after itself. Wall Street needed the Commissioner more than Twenty-third Street needed a policeman.

But as Herkomer thought of Wall Street's

needs, it occurred to him that Headquarters should know his presence. But he dismissed this idea. Headquarters could wait. He could do nothing there as yet—unless, of course, panic degenerated into riot; and even so, his subordinates could cope with anything like that.

He was in the financial district now; his blue-garbed companion was standing up in the machine, hoarsely bawling for the right of way, which was given. Yet of the scores of thousands on the streets and sidewalks, hardly one gave a glance toward the racing machine; they were too intent on their thoughts, their fears, to which newsboys gave shouting expression:

“Panic on Wall Street—panic on Wall Street!”

“Stay by the car,” Herkomer commanded the officer as he drew up before the Seventy-third National. He alighted and ran up the steps, to be met halfway by Malcolm.

The debonair young genius of finance was no longer debonair. He fairly seized Herkomer by the arm, dragging him past the long queue of customers, practically all of whom, the Commissioner noted, were at the paying

teller's windows. Herkomer pursed his lips. A panic that, a quarter of an hour after the newsboys are shrieking it on the streets, has started incipient runs upon banks, is pretty serious.

But Herkomer hid his feeling from the banker, and was smiling as he faced Malcolm across a desk in the latter's private office.

"Now, let's have it—briefly," he said.

A certain calm about Herkomer made Malcolm ashamed of his own fright. He swallowed painfully, and when he spoke, he spoke deliberately:

"The Exchange opened steadily enough. Exactly one hour after opening time, however, it was deluged with selling-orders. Selling-orders that didn't come in thousand-share lots, but in ten-thousand-, in twenty-thousand-share orders.

"Something was wrong—radically, desperately, terribly wrong. Since the Exchange closed shortly after the beginning of the Great War, there's been nothing like this. And this panic—why, there's no excuse for it. The country is prosperous, making money——"

"Don't wander," advised Herkomer.

Malcolm brought himself back to the question of the moment.

"I was at the office of one of the governors of the Exchange when the thing started. From the beginning I could see that it promised to be bad, so I raced over here to my bank, to steady my people against the rush that was inevitable, to try and steady our customers. But I've kept in touch with the governors. While you were on your way down here, they 'phoned me again—it's the Conybear-Clurg-Prendergast - Larned - Mikells crowd that started this. Their brokers—we know that the big selling-houses are operating for them, although they'll admit nothing—started with an attack on Conybear's own pet stock, Amalgamated Products—to throw dust in somebody's eyes, I guess. But that was only the beginning; transportation, textiles, steel—everything is being thrown overboard.

"And it's been done without any rhyme or reason except the greed of Conybear and his crowd! That's why he took his cash reserve from my vaults this morning. I don't know how much he had in gold-certificates, but I do know that it was over fifty millions, for he

said as much once. Think! In addition to the prestige of his name, in addition to the credits he'll establish with all the stock he's sold, he'll have fifty millions—and millions, tens of millions more that the others will furnish—to buy at the low marks that will be established to-day; and——”

“But what's his game? Just to make money on a bear market?”

Malcolm shook his head despairingly. “There's been a rumour that he intended to combine Amalgamated Products and all the transcontinental railroads and coastwise shipping lines. I know that he and several others went to the President a year ago, asking him what were the chances for the repeal of the Sherman Law and the other anti-trust laws.”

“A megalomaniac!” cried Herkomer.

“Maybe. But Conybear had it worked out wonderfully. He showed the President exactly how such a combination would reduce the cost of living, would make for efficiency and all that sort of thing. Government ownership of everything—only Conybear and his associates were to be the Government!

“But the President dismissed him imme-

diately. It was absurd for Conybear to propose such a thing. But the laws can't prevent him from owning a majority of the different industries. He can go around having interlocking directorates, too. He can, with his crowd, own practically everything of importance, do away with wasteful competition——"

"It sounds worthy," interpolated Herkomer.

"Of course. Those things always *sound* well. Only, Conybear will use the thing as a means to further wealth. But only a saint from heaven bearing St. Peter's seal would be able to get the consent of the American people and Government to what, on the face of it, is a return to those principles of private ownership without public responsibility from which we have only recently escaped!

"But Conybear seems to have been obsessed with the idea of combination. And if not combination in name, combination in effect. And what better time than now, when Europe is dreadfully in debt, when we've loaned millions, billions, almost, abroad, and Europe is buying none of our stocks or bonds!"

“What has that to do with it?” demanded Herkomer.

“Everything! Even Conybear couldn’t fight the wealth of a normal Europe. And a normal Europe would be so interested in our markets here that it would hurl millions into the Street to-morrow—this afternoon. But Conybear has only to fear his fellow-capitalists, and those are with him—the biggest of them, at any rate.”

“And you think that the bottom is going to be knocked out of everything?”

“It’s being knocked out now,” groaned Malcolm.

“Then what can I do?”

“Do? Conybear is obsessed. Megalomania is right! He thinks that he can get away with a thing like this! Man dear, if this panic lasts into to-morrow,—and the Exchange can’t close down again as it did when the Great War broke out,—if this panic continues into to-morrow, Conybear and his crowd will ride rails. And all your police department and the Federal government can’t stop it, either! Wall Street has been decent for a long time; the thimble-rigging is ended. It’s a legitimate

market for the legitimate investor now. Wall Street is essential to the business life of the nation, and the business life means the actual life. Wall Street has survived a thousand blows. It can survive no blow like this. If the people come to realize that their life savings are still at the mercy of a buccaneer like Conybear—God help Wall Street! So it's up to you—up to you to find Conybear, and if he won't listen to reason, then it's up to you to make him heed force!"

"You mean?"

"I mean that when one man can jeopardise a nation, it's up to the guardians of the law to enforce its spirit, not its letter. It's up to you to place a dangerous megalomaniac like Conybear under restraint."

Herkomer shrugged his shoulders at this phase of the situation.

"First catch your rabbit," he said laconically. "Where is Conybear?"

Malcolm thumped the desk with a knotted fist. "I shut up that fool out in Portsmouth," he snapped. "It's bad enough for people to know that one man can do a thing like this, but if they realised that the kidnapping of one

man—but that's absurd," he ended more calmly. "Conybear has just decided to get under cover for a while. And you want to drag him out."

"But his brokers—he left instructions with them?" asked Herkomer.

"They won't admit it; they simply grin and say nothing," was Malcolm's reply. "But I happen to know—one of the governors told me this half an hour ago—that a list of brokers had sealed orders from Conybear to be opened this morning. And those sealed orders contained instructions to sell, all along the line, until further word from him. That is in the strictest confidence, of course."

"And you think I can make Conybear give that word?"

"I could, if I were Police Commissioner," said Malcolm savagely.

"But you spoke of kidnapping? How can that be, if Conybear was at your vaults this morning? You saw him?"

Malcolm shook his head. "No; I was down at the Exchange conferring with one of the governors on a private matter—it has to do with a new course at my golf-club," he grinned

reluctantly. "But Conybear came here, attended by a band of retainers with suit-cases, and—well, I entered his vaults myself awhile ago. They're stripped—clean. And I know what he had there! So he's around town, and—he passed that Amalgamated dividend merely to pave the way for this panic! If I——"

Then Malcolm stopped short as his telephone rang. He listened for a moment, and then he turned, with a queer look in his eye, to Herkomer.

"It's Symons, Hathway Symons, president of Amalgamated," he said dully, "and Symons tells me that he's calling a conference of bankers, that Conybear is kidnapped, and so are Larned and——"

Herkomer grabbed the instrument.

"Symons? This is Commissioner Herkomer. If you have anything more to say about the gentlemen just mentioned, don't say it over the telephone! You understand?"

"I do," cried Symons, "and I understand, further, that you've put me off before on this matter. Your police force is incompetent. Five of the biggest men in America have dis-

appeared; panic follows upon their disappearance, and you bid me keep quiet!"

"But you must realize what public knowledge of this matter means," parried Herkomer.

"Can it possibly mean more than what is happening now?" cried Symons. "You've had plenty of time in which to apprehend the kidnapers, restore their victims; and yet when I telephoned your office a moment ago, your man Kelcey, whom I talked with first, tells me that there is nothing to report as yet. Nothing to report!"

"But you're talking to me now, not Kelcey," said Herkomer, sweetly.

"Well, what have you to report? Have you found Conybear?"

"No, but I know where he is."

"You do? Where? For God's sake tell me, so that——"

"Easy. I can't tell you—yet."

"Why not?"

"Do you happen to remember that I am Commissioner of Police?"

"Well?"

"I don't tell department business to every one. But you may take my word for it—take

my word for this: if Burton Conybear is not at his office to-morrow morning, there will be a new Commissioner of Police. In the meantime, the panic can't be checked. Let it run its course. Conybear will be on hand. Is that enough?"

"I suppose it must be," grunted Symons. "May I tell that, on your authority, to my associates?"

"You may," said Herkomer.

He hung up the receiver, to meet the amazed eyes of Malcolm.

"Do you know where Conybear is?" asked Malcolm.

Herkomer shook his head. "He was here this morning. In the fastest automobile, he couldn't have gone more than a few hundred miles from this bank. So I know that much. He's in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut or Massachusetts. Considering what a big earth this is, that's narrowing his whereabouts down quite a bit, don't you think?"

"Are you joking? At a time like this?"

"Tearing hair doesn't seem to have helped you much," smiled Herkomer.

Malcolm cast a rueful glance at the door of his office, the glass panels of which mirrored him fairly well. He smoothed his tousled head.

"*Can* you locate Conybear before to-morrow morning?"

"If I don't, I'll resign."

"That won't help much."

"But I'd hate to resign," said Herkomer.

Malcolm threw up his hands impatiently. "Never mind the cryptic stuff now," he said. "What are you going to do? You didn't let Symons finish—or I didn't. What about those others?"

Herkomer looked the young banker over carefully. True, Malcolm was excited, but so was Herkomer, though he hid it a bit better. And Malcolm had brains. He might be able to aid. Swiftly, not wasting a word, Herkomer told the banker the events that had transpired since Peter Perkins had come into the Commissioner's office with the note signed by Conybear.

Malcolm waited, with a patience rather remarkable considering his excitement, until Herkomer had finished. And now Malcolm

was the keen, reasoning man of affairs again.

"That note you mention? The one you showed me?"

Herkomer nodded.

"Let me see it again," demanded Malcolm.

Herkomer produced it from his pocket.

Malcolm studied it only a moment. "The signature is genuine," he announced, "but the body of the note—it's a forgery!"

"It *doesn't* look as though Conybear *had* been kidnapped," said Herkomer, dryly, "—considering that he was in his vaults here to-day."

"But why such a silly forgery?" mused Malcolm. He reached for the telephone. He asked for the number of the Portsmouth National Bank.

"If my friend out there knew about it—it was brought to you sealed?"

Herkomer nodded assent. Another mystery, added to those already confronting them, was rather dazing. Neither spoke until Malcolm got the Portsmouth banker on the telephone. Malcolm asked only a few questions. Then he hung up and turned to the Commissioner.

“He says that a half-witted man named Peter Perkins went to his bank this morning and said that he ought to get a reward for telling him that Burton Conybear was kidnapped. He seemed quite upset when he got no reward. He said that the Commissioner of Police in New York had rewarded him for giving him a letter from Mr. Conybear, and he thought that my friend in Portsmouth ought to do as much. This Perkins, as you’ve said, is a half-wit, and my friend reiterates that statement, but—Perkins evidently knew the contents of the letter, and——”

But now Herkomer had taken up the telephone and Malcolm was quiet. Herkomer asked for the Portsmouth chief of police, and got him within three minutes. He announced his identity and asked that the Portsmouth police round up and bring immediately to headquarters in New York the man Peter Perkins.

“He isn’t as foolish as he’d have had me think,” he said to Malcolm. He reached for his hat. “I ought to be at my office. I can’t do anything for you, Malcolm, except to tell you that I’ll be on the job. And if anything

comes up—man, there's no cryptogram in that note!"

For the banker was studying the note that was signed by Conybear, but the body of which was, indisputably if Malcolm said so, a forgery.

"No," said Malcolm, "but it's odd paper. This waterproofed stuff—it's Government stuff—limited supply, sold only to the Government, to the State Department—used for messages carried by secret-service agents and all that sort of thing. Note-paper's a hobby of mine, you know," he added half-apologetically.

"I see," said Herkomer. He reached for the note, put it in his pocketbook, and with an effort at a cheerful farewell and a promise to keep Malcolm in touch with events, he left the bank. In the lobby special policemen were keeping back the panic-stricken crowd, that feared that every second of delay might add years to the time when it should receive its money. Panic is an ugly thing, and the faces of the crowd were ugly.

And upon Herkomer it rested to relieve the fears of this crowd and thousands of other

crowds, all over the country, like this one. Herkomer must find Conybear, who, if not kidnapped, was apparently as lost to the business world, although he had been in the Seventy-third National Bank and had drawn over fifty million dollars in gold-certificates from his vaults this very morning. This very morning!

The traffic-policeman was waiting in the car. He served once more to clear the path for the Commissioner as the automobile raced toward Headquarters. There, in his office, Herkomer found Kelcey in a fever of impatience. But another man was there, even more excited. This man was William Sinsabaugh, and Herkomer was very glad indeed to see Mr. Sinsabaugh.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IT WAS no time for evasions, for keeping matters in the dark. By to-morrow morning, unless the Commissioner of Police had located the missing financiers, the whole city, the whole country, the whole world, would know of the kidnappings—if, in parenthesis, kidnappings they were. William Sinsabaugh was a business man, a big business man. If he were in some fashion connected with what Herkomer had begun to term, to himself, the Great Plot, then any information that the Commissioner could give him would be no surprise. And if he were innocent of any complicity, he would, being a man of affairs, know enough to be silent.

Sinsabaugh spoke first.

“This officer here”—and he pointed to Kelcey—“has placed me under arrest. He refuses to state why. May I beg that you will explain to me?”

“I ain’t arrested him, Commissioner,” cor-

rected Kelcey. "I knew you wanted to see him, and when I run across him at the desk of the Plutonia,—I went back there to quiz the employees once more, just on general principles,—I told him that you'd like to see him, and was kinda firm about his comin' down here. But I didn't arrest him."

Sinsabaugh smiled sourly. "A distinction with mighty little difference," he stated. "What do you want of me, Commissioner?" he demanded.

Kelcey had found Sinsabaugh at the desk of the Plutonia—where Waring had been, for a few moments, last night!

"Were you looking for Philip Waring?" asked Herkomer.

"Waring?" Sinsabaugh's face expressed blank surprise. "Is he at that hotel?"

"He was," said Herkomer grimly.

He eyed the other man. Then he placed his cards upon the table.

"You've heard the newsboys crying panic, Mr. Sinsabaugh?"

"It may perhaps occur to you that this panic is one reason why I'd like to be at my desk," snapped Sinsabaugh.

“And it might have averted this panic if you had told the truth last night about Philip Waring’s presence in your home. Wait,” said Herkomer hastily as the big man’s face crimsoned. “This isn’t a time to mince words. Listen!”

And as he had told Malcolm, so he told Sinsabaugh his suspicions, his beliefs.

“Now, Mr. Sinsabaugh,” he ended, “Waring is undoubtedly a friend of yours; you want to help him. I admire that. But shielding a friend when that friend is doing irreparable damage to a nation’s business, when that friend has been mixed up in murder—— Was Waring at your house last night?”

“But it’s absurd to think Phil Waring is in a thing like this,” cried Sinsabaugh.

“Yet he was at your house last night, and fled the officers sent to arrest him, didn’t he?” insisted Herkomer.

Sinsabaugh was loyal; it hurt him to betray a friend. But if Phil was really the tremendous rascal that Herkomer’s suspicions made him out to be, then it was Sinsabaugh’s duty to aid the police.

“Waring has done no wrong; he told me as

much," he said stubbornly. "And I believe him, and will believe him. But, under the circumstances, I can see your side of it, the mighty suspicious side of it, Mr. Herkomer. And Phil—Phil's level-headed enough, and honest as the day, but he might, innocently enough, have let himself in for something. Yes, he was at my house last night."

It was not disloyalty to Phil that loosened his tongue; it was not the fear that his business interests would suffer by his detention here during the panic. It was simply that, after all, Herkomer represented the law, and the law had made out a case plausible enough to demand Sinsabaugh's aid. Sinsabaugh was a good friend, but he was also a good citizen, and citizenship rises above friendship—or should.

"How'd he get away?" demanded Herkomer.

"Side door."

Herkomer waved aside Sinsabaugh's last-night's denial to the police of Waring's presence in the Sinsabaugh mansion. The truth, not reasons for previous evasion or falsehood, was what the Commissioner wanted now.

Further, Herkomer was a very human person. He too would have shielded a friend from the police, under similar circumstances.

"Leave his address?"

"No. Said that he'd 'phone. Told me that if I heard anything, not to believe it. And I don't," he added stoutly.

"Then what were you doing at the Plutonia, the hotel he went to?" questioned Herkomer.

"I didn't know he'd been there," said Sinsabaugh hotly, angry at the apparent imputation that he lied.

"I believe you," said Herkomer quietly.

But Sinsabaugh insisted on explanation. "We had another guest at dinner last night, a Miss Claire Sorel, from Paris—at least, her uncle, a Mr. Peter Randall, makes his home there, and she's lived abroad a long time. My wife had met her, and so she was asked to dinner. My wife wanted her to meet Waring."

"And Waring dined with you last night?"

Rather cool of Waring, Herkomer mused, to fulfil a social obligation in the midst of the desperate matters in which he was involved.

"He did. He didn't want to come, but

when I mentioned Miss Sorel's name, he seemed quite interested—she too, when they met, but it was a mutual error. Neither had met the other before, although I think that each of them had heard of the other."

"So?" Herkomer pricked up his ears at this. He started to ask what Miss Sorel looked like, thinking for a second that she might be the woman who had been in Waring's room when Dan Grimfel mulcted Waring of a hundred dollars. But that was absurd. If she'd been a guest of the hotel, as Miss Sorel was, she'd not have needed to register again. Indeed, she couldn't have done such a thing, using another name.

"And how did Miss Sorel leave your house without the officers on watch knowing it?"

"I guess your men only watched the front door," grinned Sinsabaugh. "She seemed a little upset by the presence of policemen; it made her nervous, and so I let her out the side door too."

Herkomer shook his head despairingly. But one doesn't get genius for a wage of eighteen hundred dollars or less. Still, the men watching Sinsabaugh's place ought to

have had some sense! But Sinsabaugh evidently knew what was passing through the Commissioner's mind, and relieved his chagrin by the remark:

"Not every one knows of that side entrance, Mr. Herkomer. There are times when a railroad man likes a private conference without newspaper men knowing about it, you know."

Herkomer nodded. It always relieved him to find that the men under him were not so blameworthy as they appeared.

"And Miss Sorel seemed to have heard of Waring," he said thoughtfully. "I'd like to speak with her."

"So would I," said Sinsabaugh. "My wife picked up a rather expensive brooch that she'd dropped, and as it was on my way to my office, I thought I'd drop in and deliver it to her. But the clerk told me that she had left early this morning, leaving no address. Merely took a taxi to the Grand Central."

"H'm." Herkomer pursed his lips. Then he shrugged his shoulders. This was unimportant. However:

"Better let me have the brooch, then, hadn't you?" he said. "You say it's valuable?"

"I've bought trinkets like it," said Sinsabaugh wryly. "They don't come under a couple of thousand."

Herkomer whistled. "Most women would have been at your house before this."

He examined the trinket. "Wore it at her breast? Yes? Don't see how she could have missed it." He laughed. "But leaving a trinket at a friend's house hardly comes under the 'lost and found' category, does it? Force of habit made me ask for it, I guess."

He started to hand it back; then his eye was caught by engraving on the back.

"'From S. to D.,' eh? Thought her name was Claire?"

"May be an heirloom," suggested Sinsabaugh.

"Rather modern design," doubted Herkomer. He passed the brooch to Sinsabaugh, who put it in his pocket.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Commissioner?" asked the railroad man.

"No. You could have done it last night; you could have delivered Waring over to my men. However, the fat's in the fire. And we don't prosecute people for helping their friends

—not while I'm Commissioner; and anyway, no warrant was shown you. . . . And you can't give me the faintest light?"

Sinsabaugh shook his head. He started to leave. Then he stopped and asked: "Do you think—have you any idea that you can locate Conybear and the rest?"

Herkomer's haggard face wrinkled in a smile. "When a man's *got* to do a thing—I'll find them, Mr. Sinsabaugh."

He turned to Kelcey as Sinsabaugh left the office.

"I'd 'a' pinched him, Commissioner," said Kelcey.

Herkomer laughed. "What for? He doesn't know anything about Waring."

"But he helped him make his get-away last night, didn't he?"

"Good Lord, what do you want a man to do when his friend and guest is wanted by the police, and that friend and guest gives assurance that he's done no wrong, and the police have no warrant, and don't name the charge until the next day? Be human, Kelcey."

"Still, under the letter of the law you could jail him."

"There's been too much letter in all law," snapped Herkomer. "I believe in the spirit of it, and in stretching the spirit, too, on occasion. What have you found out?"

Kelcey dropped his argumentative manner. His voice took on its usual drone.

"I sent a couple of men out to look up this Monte Messerman, who drove the taxi this 'Doris Marchant' came to the Plutonia in. I went myself to the Hotel Anson and talked with this Jacques Pelletier; he's an importer, lives in Dubuque, and landed only the other day on the *Montania*. He didn't know why any one should have taken his name and address. I asked him if he had many friends in New York, and he said only business acquaintances. I described Waring to him, and he recognised him at once."

"Knew Waring?" cried Herkomer.

Kelcey shook his head. "No, sir; he recognised Waring, but he recognised him as some one else. Pelletier identified this description I gave him as fitting a fellow-passenger of his on the *Montania*, a guy named Pierre Carnot. He hadn't had much conversation with this Carnot, Pelletier says, Carnot havin' been sea-

sick in his cabin most of the time. But the last night out they spoke to each other in the smoke-room, both bein' Frenchmen, you see, and had a drink together. That's where he learned Carnot's name."

"And Carnot's destination?"

"I telephoned the steamship company right from Pelletier's room, and they ran over the list of passengers for me, that arrived on the *Montania*. Carnot, in spite of his name and bein' French, lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Naturalized, I suppose. And," Kelcey went on before Herkomer could put the next question, "I sent a wire immediately to the chief of police in Grand Rapids, asking for dope on this guy Carnot. There's no answer yet, of course."

"And I hardly see what bearing any answer can have on this affair, anyhow. The man we're after isn't a man that looks like Waring; we're after Waring. . . . And still, why should Waring use the name and address of a man that landed from the *Montania*?"

Herkomer puzzled over this. He gave it up and attacked Kelcey with further questions.

"Messerman? The man that drove the girl

to the Plutonia? What did he have to say? Was he located?"

"Yes, sir. He told the men I sent to round him up that he picked up his fare on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Forty-eighth Street. He didn't know what house she come from. She was walkin' along, half-runnin', when she spied him and he spied her. She jumped in and told him to drive as fast as he could to the Plutonia. There she told him to wait for her. While she was goin' into the hotel, another taxi drove up, and a man asks Messerman if his fare said wait. And he hands Messerman fifty when Messerman answers yes, and tells him to blow. Messerman's one of these night-hawks around the Tenderloin. He don't ask no questions nor make no parley when half a century is in it for him. He drives off. But he noticed the driver of the other car. He was a guy named Cantrell, a big gun-man. He's been mixed up in a lot of gun-play, but we never had the real goods on him. I'm havin' the burg combed for him this minute."

"Good!" Herkomer nodded approvingly. His head dropped forward on his chest. It might very well be that finding this gun-man

Cantrell would solve the whole mystery, but the chances were that it would not. Common gun-men, known to the police, were not likely to know much of the plans of masters in crime such as those who must be with Waring in this matter. But still, as Messerman had pointed the way to Cantrell, Cantrell might point the way to Waring.

And something else cropped up: it would seem, from Messerman's story,—and that story had had previous corroboration from the taxi-starter at the Plutonia,—that Waring and the girl had been inveigled into a taxi that was not theirs. This indicated there were forces within forces, that— Herkomer lifted his head and stared around him in despair. He might go insane if he thought on this problem much longer. But, and he smiled whimsically, it had to be thought on.

An officer entered, announcing that a Portsmouth policeman had a prisoner for the Commissioner. Herkomer ordered them brought in, and he wasted no time in his verbal assault upon Peter Perkins, the half-wit who had brought him the Conybear note on a day that

seemed remote as the Commissioner's birth, so much had since transpired.

"Peter," said the Commissioner severely, "I'm ashamed of you."

"Well," said Peter, shuffling his feet, "I give you a good chance to gimme a big reward, and you can't call two dollars much, can you? Leastwise, it's a lot, but I kinda thought that if I took my time I might get more."

Herkomer hid a smile. Peter had the cunning of a naïve child who, possessing a secret, and knowing that it is important, hides it—and yet does not realise how very important it is.

"Well, if I gave you two dollars the last time you were here, and you kept something back from me, how much should I give you to get everything you know?"

It was better to placate than to browbeat.

"Twenty dollars," cried Peter.

A moment later, a twenty-dollar bill crumpled in his pocket, Peter was telling the true history of the Conybear cry for help.

"Well," he said, "I didn't find the note at four o'clock in the mornin' like I said. It was

given to me about eight o'clock by a man I'd never seen before. I was—well, I was trespassin' on Mr. Conybear's land on my way back from the beach where I'd been clammin', and that's why I said I found the note on the road. The man said I wouldn't get into no trouble for trespassin' if I done what he told me to do, but I was scared and I couldn't believe him, could I? How'd I know? But he gimme two dollars and said that was all he had in his clothes, and the Police Commissioner of New York would give me some more, lots more, he said, and well——” Peter drew a long breath before he went ahead.

“Well, after he finished writin' the note, he put it in the envelope and addressed it and give it to me. And I opened it and read it, and bimeby I come to New York and got two dollars from you, and to-day I got thinkin' about it, and my mother had found the two dollars and took 'em from me; and I'd read the note before I sealed it, the man havin' forgot to seal it, so I went to the banker in Portsmouth, thinkin' he'd want to know all about Mr. Conybear, and he laughed at me, and—I ain't done nothin', and I want to go

home," wailed Peter, forgetful of the twenty in his pocket.

Herkomer reminded him of his fortune, and Peter's tears were quickly dried. But nothing more, by the shrewdest questioning, could be elicited from the half-wit; he could not even describe the man who had given him the note, but was certain that it was not Conybear himself. And Herkomer dismissed the man, convinced that he finally told the truth.

Another mystery! If the man had written the note in Peter's presence, Malcolm had been right in declaring it a forgery. And, of course, the signature might have been on the paper beforehand—doubtless had been, in fact, unless Malcolm was less a chirographic expert than Herkomer believed him to be.

Once again Herkomer's thoughts were interrupted, this time by the telephone. The speaker was one of those officers detailed to find Cantrell, the gun-man chauffeur. . . . Herkomer put down the receiver with a groan. For Cantrell had been found; but in a hospital—dead. Two men, so the officer said, had been brought into the hospital in the early hours of the morning. They had been in a

taxicab, both apparently on the front seat; they had been speeding along Riverside Drive, had skidded in a pool formed by a slight shower, had been overturned, and both were dead. The man Cantrell had been identified by his chauffeur's license, and friends summoned from the garage where he stored his car had recognised his companion as a man named Durney. Both, hurried to the hospital in an ambulance, had died without recovering consciousness. There was no evidence of foul play. Accident had robbed Herkomer of a link in his chain.

He gritted his teeth as he turned back to his desk. Kelcey stood silently by, with no suggestion to offer. Herkomer reviewed events once more:

The note signed by Conybear; the disappearance of the millionaires; Conybear's association with Waring in the matter of drawing twenty-five thousand dollars from the bank; the murders of the two policemen and the Japanese servant in Waring's apartment; Waring's swift departure from the Plutonia with the girl "Doris Marchant;" Conybear's withdrawal of his gold-reserve from his vaults

this morning; the panic, which doubtless had now temporarily ceased with the closing of the Exchange for the day, but which would begin with renewed fury to-morrow morning, unless—unless—

“A telegram, sir,” said Kelcey, loath to interrupt his chief’s brown study.

Herkomer took it; he read it mechanically; then, his eyes burning, he ran through it again. It read:

Herkomer, Police Department, N. Y.

Peter Randall, Government agent in Paris, cabled to-day great plot against finances of world frustrated by arrests made by him. Says has been employing this end discredited agent this Government named Chesley. Advises us disregard Chesley’s former record place ourselves his disposal and advise metropolitan police departments obey Chesley and place forces at his disposal. Randall trusts Chesley and Department will do as he says. Plot concerns kidnapping of financiers. Has New York panic spreading all over country any relation to this information? Randall states sent two agents recently to work with Chesley, girl named Claire Sorel and French stool-pigeon named Carvajal. Latter just arrived this country via *Montania* traveled

under name of Carnot and was to report arrival to you and disclose details. Have you heard from him?

The message was signed by the chief of the secret service of the United States Government, and even as Herkomer was feverishly composing a reply, another telegram arrived from the same person. This one stated that a cable just received from the French police stated that Peter Randall had been assaulted by persons unknown just outside a cable-office in Paris, and was now unconscious in his apartments.

The business was narrowing down—but narrowing down to what? Once again the Commissioner dropped into a study. Light began to filter through the mystery here and there. For instance, Malcolm, who ought to know, had said that the Conybear appeal for rescue was written on a note-paper peculiar to the secret-service branch of the Government. The discredited agent, Chesley, might have had such paper in his possession. But if Chesley had written the note, why hadn't he merely called the police on the telephone? It would have been much simpler, and there would have been

no kidnappings, no murders. Herkomer shook his head, puzzled.

And Claire Sorel! If she were a Government agent, why had she disappeared from the Plutonia this morning? And was her failure to recognise Waring,—or her recognition, or whatever had been the underlying cause of what Sinsabaugh had described as her peculiar manner toward Waring,—was that important or unimportant? Did it have any bearing whatsoever? It was so hard to know what was important and what was not. It was safer, perhaps, to figure everything as important. Peter Randall could explain, but if the French police, who undoubtedly knew of Randall's part in the exposure of the plots in Europe, stated that he was unconscious, Randall was surely unable to explain. For the French police would be only too ready to give information to their colleagues across the ocean. That they did not volunteer it was proof sufficient that they had none to give—none, at least, bearing upon Randall's or Chesley's activities in America.

Herkomer scratched out the message that he had begun, a message that contained a de-

mand that the secret-service head cable Paris at once and get definite details. Instead he wrote the laconic sentence:

Better catch the first train to New York.

Kelcey left the room. He returned in a moment bringing another telegram. Herkomer opened it. It was from the chief of police of Grand Rapids, and conveyed information that Herkomer already knew: that no Pierre Carnot was known in that Michigan town.

Herkomer smiled, wanly. No one knew anything—including himself.

But the mention of Pierre Carnot's name in the telegram made Herkomer think again of Pelletier, and of Waring's assumption of that name. And then he thought of the real Pelletier's description of his fellow-passenger, the description that corresponded to Waring. The height, the colouring of hair and eyes, that Herkomer would himself give, were he asked to describe Waring—the same description that was, or should be, in the mind of every police officer in New York—flashed through Herkomer's brain. And unconsciously he began

fitting that description to some one else—to the unidentified man, apparently a Frenchman, who had been picked up dead, killed by an automobile in front of Waring's apartment-house.

Pelletier's description would fit this man Carnot, or Carvajal. And Carvajal's description, then, would fit the victim of the automobile accident. Was there a connection? The man had been killed in front of Waring's apartment, killed fleeing from Waring. There *must* be a connection—in which case it was possible that Waring was playing Carvajal's part. But why, then, had he chosen the name of Jacques Pelletier?

Herkomer's brain, travelling all around the edges of this mystery of mysteries, touched again at a salient point. The man who had given Peter Perkins the note was apparently, from what Peter said, one of the Conybear household. Only one member, besides Conybear, of that household was missing. That one was Henderson, the secretary-valet with whom Herkomer had himself talked regarding Conybear's note. Could Henderson, the secretary-valet, be Chesley, the secret agent? But

if so— And Herkomer was up against the everlasting questions again. Why hadn't Henderson, or Chesley, told Herkomer about the note, that he had himself written it, when Herkomer telephoned?

Herkomer bethought himself of something. He telephoned Portsmouth and told the police department there to meet the Portsmouth chief and Peter Perkins on their arrival home, and tell the chief to take Perkins to the Conybear country-house and have the half-wit endeavour to identify any member of the household as the person who had given him the note. But the Commissioner instinctively felt that this was a waste of effort: Henderson, the missing man, was the one that had written it. So instinct told him, and Herkomer believed instinct.

The hours passed. Portsmouth reported that Peter Perkins recognized no member of the Conybear household as the writer of the note. It must have been Henderson.

A deputation of the governors of the Stock Exchange, headed by President Symons of Amalgamated Products Company, called, to beg, to beseech, to pray Herkomer for information which he could not give them. They

left, threatening to have his political head if the missing financiers were not produced, as Herkomer had promised Symons they should be, before the Exchange opened in the morning.

The Mayor, luckily, was on his vacation, and the governor was confined to his bed with the after-effects of an operation for appendicitis. Herkomer could not be removed out of hand, but—there was small comfort in that. There was only this much comfort: the newspapers, although they denounced Conybear and his associates for their absence at a time when strong men were needed in the market, did not give credit to the missing millionaires for any decent attributes; they assumed that their absence was voluntary. No hint of kidnapping had reached the press. Nor did any cables from Europe mention the failure of a great plot over there that would inevitably have led to comparison and assumption over here.

By ten o'clock the chief of the secret-service department was in Herkomer's office. But in half an hour he and the Commissioner were reduced to the one telling, and the other listening to, the story of one Victor Chesley's

withdrawal from the department. For the chief could deduce nothing from what Herkomer could tell him, and Herkomer could really tell him little.

It was midnight when the Washington man rose to his feet.

"Well, as far as I can see, there's nothing to be done but take our medicine," he announced. "Paris says that Randall won't be out of his stupor for several days. There's no further information to be got from him. I'm going to a hotel, sleep on it, and—pray. You'd better do the same."

"I suppose so," sighed Herkomer.

He had reached for his hat and coat, when the telephone rang. He listened a moment, ejaculated formless exclamations, hung up and turned to the secret-service chief.

"Ever hear of Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh?" he asked.

"Wife of the railroad man?"

"Uh-huh! Silly little thing—butterfly, gadabout, hubby's money-spender—all that sort of thing. I've never met her, but I've heard of her. And I've had the gall to pity Sinsabaugh. As if it wasn't patent to the com-

mon sense that a man like Sinsabaugh wouldn't stand for a woman like that unless she were more than a doll. Had brains."

"Well, what about it?"

"Oh, nothing much,"—smiled Herkomer wearily,—“except that she's just given me a tip that—— The woman Claire Sorel left a brooch at Sinsabaugh's house. It was engraved 'From S. to D.' That didn't mean much, either to me or to Mr. Sinsabaugh. But a scrap of paper that Mrs. Sinsabaugh found by her desk-telephone in her boudoir—the telephone that Miss Sorel had asked permission to use last night—— It happened that Miss Sorel had once told Mrs. Sinsabaugh that the brooch was a gift to her. Naturally, when her husband pointed out the engraving, Mrs. Sinsabaugh thought that it was funny.

"In her boudoir to-night Mrs. Sinsabaugh chanced upon the scrap of paper I just mentioned. Instead of berating her maid for untidiness, she looked at the paper. On it was a telephone-number, 'Bryant 272727.' No, I didn't write it down—three twenty-sevens aren't hard to remember. And on it also was the name 'Simon Bergson.' That name doesn't

mean much to you, but to Mrs. Sinsabaugh—‘Simon Bergson’ is the name of the man that Carey Haig, a defaulting trustee, uttered with his dying breath some months ago. And Carey Haig had stolen the Philip Waring fortune, and Philip Waring is a friend of Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh’s. Get it?”

“I don’t see much,” said the secret-service man. “What’s it to do with Conybear?”

Herkomer shook his head; head-shaking was getting to be a bit of a habit with him recently.

“Neither do I! I don’t have to. Anything that has to do with Philip Waring interests me, because Waring has been seen with Conybear since Conybear left Portsmouth. But that isn’t all. Mrs. Sinsabaugh’s husband is a stockholder in the telephone-company. Hence she has a book which gives numbers first and names afterward. She looked for 272727 under ‘Bryant.’ She found the name—it isn’t ‘Bergson’; it’s ‘Clarkson,’ as a matter of fact, and it’s a private hospital—the Clarkson Hospital.

“And then what do you suppose she did? She took a car over to that hospital—it’s on Fiftieth near Sixth Avenue. And Mrs. Willy

Sinsabaugh, all by herself, is watching that house into which, as she walked by ten minutes ago, having dismissed her car at the corner, as she reconnoitred,—bless her kid heart,—she saw Burton Conybear walk!”

“Then what in the name of heaven are we sitting here idling for?” cried the man from Washington.

“Because the minute I hung up the ’phone I pressed a button under my foot,” smiled Herkomer, “and it’s taken until just about now for reserves to pile into autos. I think we’ll find them waiting for us if we go downstairs now. Care to come along?”

“Care to—oh, gosh!” said the secret-service man.

Dumbly but swiftly he followed Herkomer downstairs—followed Herkomer, whose heart sang a song, with a somewhat bitter refrain, about as follows:

“And a woman did it by accident, by accident, by accident!”

Still, if he, Herkomer, hadn’t followed the Waring trail, Mrs. Sinsabaugh would never have had reason to suspect, would never have examined the scrap of paper, would never have

thought anything of the engraving in the brooch, that engraving which had justified her in reading the scrap of paper with the telephone-number. For, in parenthesis, be it remarked that Mrs. Willy never could quite excuse herself for reading something written in another's hand and patently not for Mrs. Willy's eyes. But the engraving had proved "Miss Claire Sorel" a liar, and liars must expect to have their scraps of paper read. Mrs. Willy often felt guilty about this breach of a guest's right to privacy. Mrs. Willy was a dear.

And the droning engines, as Herkomer raced uptown, seemed to repeat: "By accident, by accident, by accident!"

He only prayed that some further accident might not wreck his sudden hope. After all, he wasn't after glory; he was after results. And results seemed very near. He was first to arrive at the door of the Clarkson Private Hospital.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Two automobiles, crowded with plain-clothes men, stood at Sixth Avenue and Fiftieth Street. Two others, similarly crowded, stood at Fifth Avenue and the same street. Four others debouched a score of officers within a few doors of where Herkomer's automobile had stopped.

Kelcey, the secret-service man, Lieutenant Dan McGaw and a plain-clothes man followed Herkomer up the steps of the Clarkson Private Hospital. A glance down the street, just before he rang the bell, showed to Herkomer the slim figure of a woman expostulating with one of the officers guarding the approach. Doubtless Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh, anxious to be in at the death! For the electric light under which she stood showed her to be most expensively apparelled.

Mrs. Willy was game to the point of recklessness. Herkomer smiled. But appreciation of Mrs. Willy's merits could wait a later time. He rang the bell.

For a moment after the door opened Herko-

mer was inclined to believe that a wild-goose chase had brought him here. Under the softening light above, the white-garbed nurse who opened the door seemed innocent, seemed, by her very ministering presence, to make his errand fantastically bizarre.

"Dr. Clarkson in?"

"Dr. Clarkson has retired," was the answer.

"Some one else, then."

"We receive no patients save by engagement," was the answer.

The nurse gently closed the door. But Herkomer's foot held it partly open.

"I want to come in," he said.

And then the whole manner of the demure nurse changed. Her face grew hard, vicious. She threw her whole weight against the door. But she was one woman, and there were five men opposed to her already, with reinforcements loitering outside. Herkomer broke through the door.

But the white-garbed woman eluded him—leaped backwards. There must have been a button in the wall, for two iron doors shot forward to meet and bar the way. Herkomer had paused involuntarily as the woman broke from

his detaining clutch, and it was this that saved him from being crushed between the two sheets of steel. And the fact that the plain-clothes man had thrust a night-stick forward—he had had experience with gambling-dens as elaborately guarded as this “hospital”—held the two iron doors apart.

The mechanism was thus deranged. There was no need of the hydraulic jacks that one of the police automobiles carried. The doors would undoubtedly have been a strong barrier had they met, but parted—they rolled back easily. Herkomer led the way into the hall just in time to see the figure of the nurse turn the corner at the head of the first flight of stairs.

He did not hesitate, but mounted the stairs. The woman's flight seemed to give certain proof that Mrs. Sinsabaugh was right, but the Commissioner could not help wondering what would lie behind that turn, one flight above. Nothing, he thought, could surprise him—and yet he was surprised.

For standing in the doorway of a room stood a lean, eagle-nosed, sunken-eyed man. The revolver that he held in his hand was to have

been expected; it was his calm that amazed Herkomer. Had he shouted, had he threatened, Herkomer would have hurled himself forward. But the unhurried utterance, the calm evenness of the man's voice, halted Herkomer.

"Stop—please. You have found me. There is no haste."

He did not menace with his weapon. He seemed to know that a threatening gesture with it would mean an overwhelming rush that he might stop in part, but not in its entirety. The very fact that he held the revolver loosely in his hand, at his side, made him seem more dangerous.

Herkomer laboured for his breath, lost in the dash upstairs. He held back, by his own halt, the men behind him.

"You are under arrest," he said. "It will go easier with you if you put up that revolver."

"So?" The lean man smiled cruelly. "I think not." He eyed Herkomer closely. "You may take my word for it that the men you come in search of are alive. They are here; there is no need for haste. If you move toward me——"

The revolver in his hand seemed to spring upward of its own volition. But it did not point at Herkomer. It pointed into the room that the lean man guarded. And the lean man had shifted his position as the revolver had flashed upward.

"Mr. Burton Conybear," said the lean man, "will you kindly inform these gentlemen that you are alive?"

"And will you kindly point that damn' thing the other way?" sounded the irascible voice of Conybear.

Herkomer sighed with relief. He knew Conybear's voice; he had heard it at many a banquet. The man facing him was a maniac—no question of that; Conybear's life hung on Herkomer's tact; but Conybear had lived thus far through kidnapping and what-not beside, and Herkomer felt that he could deal with the man before him.

Testy, defiant, blustering, yet somehow assuring its hearer, no matter what words it used, that calm courage backed the sound—that was Conybear's voice. And the words he used and the threat of the revolver were proof complete that Conybear, despite appearance,

had been kidnapped, had *not* created panic merely to fatten his purse.

“Don’t worry, Mr. Conybear,” cried Herkomer. “This is the Commissioner of Police, and——”

“I will talk, please,” said the man in the doorway. “You will listen.”

His lips curled back as he surveyed Herkomer.

“You have caught me—yes. But to what purpose, while I have Mr. Conybear—so?”

His revolver accented the word “so.”

“But you know we have you cornered,” said Herkomer, persuasively, as though humouring a child.

“Bah! There is a corner always open, one corner in which your men cannot stand. A pressure of a trigger, and I have passed through the door in that corner—taking your Conybear with me.”

Out of the side of his mouth Kelcey spoke. Barely audible, the words reached Herkomer’s ear.

“I can get him through my pocket, Commissioner. Say the word.”

Herkomer, by the faintest movement of his head, negatived the suggestion. Kelcey might miss, and Conybear then would die.

"But you don't want to die just yet, do you?" asked Herkomer.

The lean man shrugged his shoulders. "Now or later! What matters it when one has failed?" He eyed Herkomer. "*If* one has failed. Listen!" His words were brisk, crisp, now, no longer sardonically weary.

"How much is Mr. Conybear worth to you—alive?"

Herkomer hesitated. When he answered, he spoke to Conybear. If there were to be risk in this rescue, Conybear ought to be permitted to buy insurance against risk. Compromising with the law, with justice, is wrong, but human life is very valuable to the possessor.

"What do you say, Mr. Conybear?" he asked. It was absurd to haggle with a madman, but—it might be more absurd not to do so. Herkomer was the sort of man that hesitated to strike a friend with a club in order to kill a mosquito enjoying a siesta on the head of the friend.

"Say? Why you blasted nincompoop, you've

found me, haven't you? And if you can't drill a hole in him before he can get me—good Lord, I've toed the mark for this crazy lunatic, with a gun sticking in my ribs or within an inch of my head, until I'm sick of it. But *I* didn't have no gun at all when they handed me this deal! You *got* a gun! Go to it, and—

Herkomer's revolver was out, and he was firing as he ran forward, drowning Conybear's words with the crash. Beyond one shot at the Commissioner, the lean man paid no attention to Herkomer's rush, or to his shots; he leaped into the room. And Herkomer, gaining the doorway, felt his right hand grow suddenly numb; his revolver clattered to the floor, and he stood there blocking the way of his followers.

It was weeks before he could gain proper perspective to revisualise that room again, before he could reduce the whole picture to its component parts. Then he could get in detail what just now he got only in the mass.

Burton Conybear sat in an armchair, his legs and hands manacled. He was moving his body from side to side to avoid the shots that the

lean man fired at him. This, or the end of this scene, was what Herkomer entered upon. Then a door across the room burst open; through it came a red-haired young man whom Herkomer knew to be Waring.

Waring hurled himself upon the lean man. From still another door came the woman in the nurse's dress. She fired at Waring; and from that same door came another young woman who seized the arm of the nurse; the spitting revolver swayed toward Herkomer; instinctively he ducked. But something struck him heavily over the left temple; he reeled into the arms of Kelcey; then a rush of men, his men, went by him, and Herkomer lost consciousness.

The rasp of a file, and the sound of a voice that sounded as harsh as the working steel, broke in upon Herkomer's consciousness. He sat up, and a ringing in his brain made him dizzy. He fell back into strong arms; he looked up; the wrinkled visage of Kelcey was close to his face. He could see tears in Kelcey's eyes, though the lips of Kelcey framed a grin.

"Feelin' fine, Commissioner? Sure you are.

Nothin' wrong but a lick on the mitt and a dab on the bean. Sit up?"

The ringing and the dizziness died away. Herkomer sat up. He looked about him. There was a blood-stain on the rug before him. He looked away. He had seen violence before, but he had never been part of violence until to-night—or this morning. Which was it?

"What time is it?" he asked Kelcey.

"You ain't been lyin' here fifteen minutes, Commissioner," reassured Kelcey.

"Conybear?"

"That's him talkin'."

Through an open door Herkomer saw the grizzled old financier. He was sitting at a desk, telephoning; and as he talked, a man whom Herkomer recognised as a police chauffeur was filing away at the irons that held Conybear's feet together.

"Right!" Conybear was saying. "We'll bust this panic higher than a kite by ten-fifteen o'clock in the morning. I'll be at my office at seven. You be there; round up the others; I'll have enough cash on hand to show any-

body that's nervous that a bull market is on the way."

He hung up the receiver with his manacled hands and wheeled around, almost knocking over the kneeling man who laboured at his ankles. He spied Herkomer.

"Here, this can wait," he roared. He rose and shuffled into the next room.

"How're you feelin'?" he cried. "Great fight, wasn't it? By gosh, it made me young again! Pshaw, you didn't see it. Tough luck. Been 'phonin' my broker. I'll be on the job in the mornin'. Here, you, get busy with my feet again."

And he sank into a chair and beamed upon the Commissioner as though they were seated pleasantly in a club, chatting together.

Herkomer beamed in response, though it hurt his head to move a muscle of his face. He felt the bandage across his forehead and sighed as he looked at his likewise-bandaged hand. It would be weeks before he could play tennis again. And he loved tennis.

"What you sighin' for?" chuckled Conybear. "Ain't you landed the biggest gang that ever was and covered yourself with glory, and won't

the girls make a fuss over a handsome young feller with a wounded hand? You bet! Smile."

But Conybear's words did more than make Herkomer slightly ashamed of his regret over a pastime only temporarily lost; it made him realise clearly all that had happened, or that must have happened.

"Kelcey, sketch in the bare places, will you?"

Kelcey grinned. "Well, there's one guy on the way to the cemetery—at least he will be tomorrow."

"Shot?"

"No." And the good-natured Kelcey's tone was slightly regretful as he made the admission. "Apoplexy. Leastwise, so the doc' says."

He nodded at a bearded man in the background, who bowed acquiescence.

"Yes, but then?"

"Why, then, Commissioner, why, then, you see——"

Herkomer wondered why Kelcey should speak in so singsong a voice. He suddenly realised that he was being picked up and carried. He knew what they had done. They'd given him an injection of some sort to ease

him, and now he was going to sleep, and he wished they had let him alone. But wishes rarely alter facts. Herkomer was asleep before his bearers reached the foot of the stairs. But it was a calm, restful sleep, undisturbed by harassing dreams.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

It was almost noon when Herkomer reached his office the next day. Eight hours of solid sleep, backed up by a wonderful constitution, made him much more fit than his fussy housekeeper was willing to believe. However, despite her dire prognostications and her reiteration of what the doctor had said when he was brought home, Herkomer, after several telephone calls, left the house.

He smiled his way through the reporters, to whom enough had been given last night to delight a sensation-hungry world this morning, but who clamoured for more. He promised to talk with them in a couple of hours, and made his way to his office.

It was a good-sized gathering that had assembled there. The Sinsabaughs, man and wife, Philip Waring, Conybear,—whose mere presence had stopped the panic this morning,—a man Conybear chatted with cheerfully and whom he insisted on calling Henderson, and

two girls, one extremely pretty, though pale, and the other easily remembered as the "nurse" of last night. There was also the secret-service man from Washington.

Herkomer sat down at his desk. He eyed the group.

"Henderson," he said, "suppose you begin."

"Chesley, if you don't mind, Commissioner," was the easy reply. "Victor Chesley, formerly of the secret service."

"And *presently* of the secret service," amended the man from Washington gruffly.

Chesley smiled. "Thanks," he said. He drew a deep breath. He was not the self-effacing man who had been Conybear's secretary-valet for more months than he cared to remember. He was alert, self-confident.

"After I left the secret service, for reasons that my chief"—and he bowed to the man from Washington—"now believes were manufactured, I determined to prove that I was not a scoundrel, untrue to my government. I won't go into detail. Suffice it that I was certain that a man named Simon Bergson, a European adventurer of whom I shall not speak too harshly, because he is not here to de-

fend himself—I was sure that this man Bergson was responsible for my disgrace. Bergson was then in the business of procuring, for any government that hired him, the secrets, military or naval, of other governments. A secret of this government was stolen. I was accused of selling it. I could not prove that I had not done so.

“No matter. It is all over now. The black cloud——” He gulped, and went ahead again. “One friend in the service I had who trusted me: Peter Randall. But he knew, as well as I, that there is no return to employment in the secret service when one has once been dropped—unless under most exceptional circumstances. Randall thought he saw a way—if I would work and wait.

“He told me facts I verified. A certain group of fanatics had decided that the world was run wrongly. They intended to remedy matters. They had gathered around them hundreds, thousands of followers—some who were frankly out for gain, others who were altruists, though cranks. Those out for gain were paid for their services, and knew little. I joined this society. I became acquainted with Bergson,

who did not know me, and who, I soon learned, was to handle the American end of this society's plans for the readjustment of the world.

"I met Bergson in Paris, where Randall was located. Randall had obtained two years' leave of absence in which to ferret out this menace to society. Randall vouched for me. It was easy, for Randall was high in the society's councils.

"I came to this country with Bergson. I proposed that I affiliate myself somehow with Burton Conybear. By forging recommendations I managed to gain entrance to his employ. The rest was easy, only—I did not know the society's plans. Indeed, it was only after Mr. Conybear's kidnapping that I realised that Bergson was playing his own associates false, that he was not working for the imagined good of humanity, but was a schemer, working to enrich his own pockets. I thought that the kidnapping of Conybear was but the beginning. I looked for infinitely bigger things, and delayed action in the hope of landing the bigger game. I did not believe, nor did Randall, that Bergson was more than a minor figure in the

great game. We believed that there were giants above him."

"What was the great game?" demanded Herkomer.

"Well, some hundred millions of dollars was Bergson's great game," replied Chesley. "The game of those above him was the demonetisation of all currency. They hoped, by rendering currency valueless, to equalise all distribution of the fruits of this earth."

"But how were they going to demonetise currency?"

"Suppose that every bond in the world, every share of stock, were offered for sale—at once? There could not possibly be currency enough to meet a fraction of these demands. Bonds and stocks would be worth practically nothing in the market. True, money—gold—would be at a premium. But that would not help matters. The fact that gold would be more valuable would not make two gold dollars out of one gold dollar. And there is not gold enough in all the world to meet the obligations that exist, obligations that are bound to be paid in gold. The world—so these fanatics hoped—would see that the whole financial sys-

tem was builded on sand, that it was a house of cards. The only true values would be property and labour. The medium of exchange, money, would be dispensed with. Property and labour would be the mediums of exchange."

"Back to the days of barter and exchange. All civilisation set back. Absurd!" said Herkomer.

"Fanatics are rarely logicians," smiled Chesley. "Anyway, that was the plan. And it was to be worked out by capturing the leading financiers of the world and forcing them to sell their securities, creating panic.

"This much I gleaned. But I wanted to know definitely, to capture the fanatics when their guilt was established. And the only way I could learn anything was by being one of them. I spied upon Conybear, that I might be able to give Bergson definite, valuable information. I hired for him two gun-men, who I assured him, wouldn't stop at anything for the proper reward. They wouldn't, either, but before they ever committed any violence I hoped to have them behind the bars, to be able to use them as witnesses. Unfortunately, in

the excess of delight at the rich haul of yesterday, they drank too much—at least, I assume so. They were killed. But you know about their automobile accident.

“I placed a dictaphone in Conybear’s study; I assisted in his kidnapping. All this, that I might gather evidence—and then, at the end, to learn that Bergson had played his fanatic friends false, that, although he was a fanatic himself, he was a cunning fanatic, a greedy fanatic, with no idea of helping the world, but obsessed with the idea that he could get away with untold millions.”

“He did, up to a point,” snapped Conybear. “Why didn’t you ever tip me off to what you really were?”

“How did I know how many of your servants were spies upon me?” countered Chesley. “For instance—your chauffeur. After you were kidnapped and I learned that my message had reached the police I decided to go to New York and see the Commissioner. Matters had gone far enough. But I dared not use the telephone. And a careless word told me that the chauffeur who drove me was in the plot. Had I gone to Headquarters—

well, I didn't. I wasn't afraid for myself,—I think I've proved that,—but I feared that if anything happened to me—well, Burton Conybear might never live to enjoy his millions."

"Humph!" grunted Conybear.

"But the note? This note?" asked Herkomer, showing the creased waterproofed paper that Peter Perkins had brought to him.

"I didn't dare telephone. I didn't dare say anything definite. I could write nothing. I was followed. I was watched. I ran across a clam-digger. He was in terror of prosecution for trespassing. I had a piece of paper on which I had once got Mr. Conybear to write his name. He had thought that he was signing a document, but he wasn't."

"If you weren't what you are, but were what I thought you were, you'd be a fine one at it," grunted Conybear, not so cryptically but that he was understood.

Chesley laughed. He resumed. "I imitated Mr. Conybear's handwriting in the lines above his own signature and told the man to take it to the Commissioner of Police of New York."

"But why didn't you say something definite in it?" demanded Herkomer.

“Suppose one of the other members of the plot had seen me give the note to Perkins? No, not that, for then the fat *would* have been in the fire. But suppose that some other person had stopped the man before he left the grounds and had seen the note. If there'd been anything definite in it, the reader would have known who wrote it, despite the false handwriting. All I could do was this: give the police a tip on which they would act so as to prevent panic in the stock-market.”

“But when you reached New York? Why not telephone then? When I spoke to you asking about Mr. Conybear?” demanded Herkomer.

“The telephone at Portsmouth has other receivers. How did I know who was listening-in? And as for when I reached New York—I punctured the gasoline tank myself, so that it drained dry. But I feared that the chauffeur might telephone New York on what train I was coming. . . . You see, Bergson had grown jealous of me. He thought I aspired to greater power than himself. Further, he thought me honest, and that interfered with

his own plans—or might. The slightest excuse——”

“But when *I* telephoned you,” cried Waring. “Why lead me into their clutches?”

“And who are you?” asked Chesley. “An idle, rich young man, aren’t you? Why should I consider your safety when I was risking the life of the biggest financier in the world? Further, I feared that premature disclosure to the police of Conybear’s whereabouts would result—as I told you at the time over the telephone—with personal risk to him.

“Can’t you see?” he asked them all. “I was after big game. I did not realise that personal greed had made Bergson drop the society’s aims, that the capture of Conybear and a few of his closest intimates was all that was wanted. And when I did realise it—well, I was a prisoner, as you found me, last night, locked in a room in that private ‘hospital.’ Bergson’s jealousy had been too much for him—and us!”

The man from Washington nodded. “Chesley did everything for the best. If a whole world were menaced,—and he thought it was, and he can’t be blamed for thinking so,—beyond doing what he could to prevent immediate

panic, he could not look out for other people—not even Mr. Conybear. He wanted evidence. Thanks to Bergson's treachery to his own associates, no evidence is needed. Not on this side of the Atlantic, for the plot has failed here. Abroad—well, this morning's cables say that Randall is O. K., and the French police inform me that what Chesley thought was planned here was really planned there. The others, most of them, were honest, though fanatics. Bergson wasn't."

"He was as honest as your big financiers, like Mr. Conybear," cried the woman who had tried to bar Herkomer's entrance to Bergson's stronghold last night. "He took by force what Mr. Conybear takes by trickery."

The man from Washington eyed her. "With your permission, Herkomer, I've promised this young woman her freedom if she'll talk. She had nothing to do with the three murders; we have all the rest of Bergson's gang locked up. We have plenty of evidence. This woman really has done nothing save be cognisant of Bergson's plans. It would clear the atmosphere——"

Herkomer nodded. Prosecution of a woman

never appealed to him. He was glad of some excuse to let her go.

"It matters not to me," exclaimed the woman. "My Simon is dead; you beasts have killed him."

"He died of apoplexy," said Chesley mildly.

She sneered. "A quibble. But—one plays, one wins, one loses. What does it matter how he went? It is the end—for me too. As for your jails—they matter little. When the heart is dead, the body cares not where it is."

Softness had crept into her face, but now it hardened again. She looked at Chesley.

"You are right. My Simon was no milk-and-water fool, thinking to save a world. He was a man! It needed a man to win me, for I have not been unsought—and sought by younger men. But they were pygmies compared to him. You call him a fanatic. Maybe. So was Napoleon, then! He lost. And so has my Simon lost. But when one plays for a stake like that—Mr. Burton Conybear did not think him a fanatic but yesterday—Mr. Burton Conybear, who went to his vaults at my Simon's command and took therefrom over fifty million dollars. He took fifty million dol-

lars that only accident,”—and she glared at Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh,—“only the accident of a silly doll’s being curious took away from him.

“Oh, well, you would know about him. It matters not who he really was or how I met him. Suffice it that, garbled by prejudice, the story you have just listened to is true. Simon trusted this Randall you mention—but not too far, not enough to tell him his real plans. Only I knew those. And they were to gain the foremost financial place in the world. He did not intend to skulk into hiding after his grand *coup* had been brought off. No, indeed! He meant to defy Mr. Conybear and his associates. And he could have done so. He would have bought judges, juries—and I was to reign with him, by his side in his place of power. It was for that that I cultivated you, Mrs. Sinsabaugh. But I—I had no name. So I took the name of this doll here.” She sneered at Claire Sorel, who drew slightly nearer Waring, on whose face was written adoration.

“Social position too my Simon wanted—for us both. I had charm, he said, and would grace

his house. And so I went to Mrs. Sinsbaugh's, and there I left my Simon's name and telephone-number. And so I killed him—because I was careless, because I loved him so that I loved to look at his name, even, and kiss it, and—— He was a man. And that is all.”

Doubtless there was more, but she would not tell it. Herkomer felt that she had bought her liberty cheaply, but after all, what did it matter who Bergson had been, now that he was not? He let her go, and the office seemed sweeter for her absence. Still, she had loved Bergson, and that was something in her favour. To be able to love means good of some sort.

“You, Waring,” said Herkomer.

Waring told his story. At the mention of Carvajal, the Commissioner started.

“But he was really an aid of Randall's!” he exclaimed.

“But he'd not lost his viciousness through his police connections,” said Waring. “I was an enemy always, I imagine.”

Herkomer nodded. “And Miss Sorel?”

“Uncle dared trust few,” explained the girl. “I suppose that Carvajal had been highly recommended to him, or he would not have trusted

him. So he sent me over here. He told me of Mr. Chesley, but not under the name of Henderson. He told me really very little. I was merely to watch, to find out. Also, and it was my real reason for being with Bergson, I was to be a sort of hostage for my uncle's good faith. I knew it, and assumed the risk gladly. I looked for Uncle's aid; but had he come to me, that Carvajal——" She shuddered, and she and Waring drew nearer to each other.

Conybear arose to his feet.

"Wait a bit," said Herkomer.

The financier sat down.

"Your plans—you'd ordered your brokers to sell short all along the line, Mr. Conybear?"

"Well, what of it?"

"Why did you start a panic?"

"Panic, nonsense! I'd given orders, in envelopes to be opened yesterday, for my brokers to sell, simply because I wanted to beat certain prices down. I'd intended giving another crowd of brokers orders to buy as soon as prices began to go down. The whole crowd of us,—those four white-livered dogs that are confined to their homes to-day suffering from shock,—all of us intended to pool together

and buy. And we were going to get control of certain transportation-lines that would handle certain products and make the whole thing more efficient. The blasted government won't let us have our companies own railroads, so we intended to own them privately."

"And make scores of millions," said Chesley.

"You know it," grinned Conybear. "But at the same time we intended to lower costs and benefit the people."

Herkomer shrugged his shoulders. Crazy fanatics with fantastic plots, and Burton Conybear! Both intending to benefit the world, and some of them, incidentally, to benefit their own purses!

"A fine thing it would be if men didn't risk other people's fortunes and happiness on their own ideas of what the world needs," he said.

Conybear stared at him. "A good philosophy, at that," he grunted. "No more reformers——"

Herkomer laughed. The old financier was incorrigible.

"Still," said the man from Washington, "a jury might find you guilty on the spirit of the law, not its letter."

“Eh?” Conybear stared. He nodded comprehendingly. “A hint from Washington, eh?”

“Oh, no. A private remark from a private individual.”

“But with horse-sense behind it. I see. I guess I’ll be content,” he said.

He bent over and rubbed his ankles. “Took me for a walk, with a revolver-muzzle pressing against my ribs, and then, because I refused—when he had fifty million dollars of mine in the next room—to sign an agreement not to prosecute, and to let him retain my money, he put irons on my feet and hands—a great experience! I shall examine the credentials of my next valet,” he announced grimly. “Still,” he chuckled, “Bergson knew. I had sense, and he didn’t drug me and have me carried to his blasted place in an ambulance. Something in that.”

He looked at Chesley. “You’re a great man,” he said. “If any one had ever told me that I could look at you without wanting to kill you—if any one had ever told me that a man who led me as close to my own funeral

as you did had put me under an obligation to him—I'd have said that person was insane."

"Obligation?"

"Sure! I ain't had an experience with gunmen since I was twenty-two, and it's great to learn that I ain't lost my pep!"

He cast a grinning glance about the room, and then he left. The office seemed smaller after he had gone. He took with him something of elemental bigness. There was silence, broken after a moment by a question from Claire Sorel.

"My uncle is out of danger?" she asked the man from Washington.

"He is—absolutely," was the reassuring response.

"And will I be needed to testify?" she asked Herkomer.

The Commissioner shook his head. "Murder and conspiracy to murder is a charge that will send all the gang to jail. The kidnapping can be dropped. They'll pay enough as it is. And we have ample testimony against the murderers without you." He smiled quizzically. "You and Mr. Waring, although you have been through a lot together, although you were

prisoners, although you've both faced the threat of death together—you don't seem to have very much to say to each other."

The gathering had become something like a family party. The intimate remark, that might have been resented at another time, seemed perfectly natural in the reaction that had followed upon explanation. Claire blushed. So did Waring.

"I'll have a whole lot to say to her when we're alone," he said stoutly.

He drew his hand across his forehead, where Durney had struck him when they entered the wrong taxicab. He knew whose hands had bound his head. He knew who had defied Bergson to kill him, who had sworn that if Waring were killed, it would be necessary to kill her also, for she would betray Bergson to the police. He knew who had been able to do all this and yet not let Bergson think that she was anything but a suddenly love-sick girl; he knew who had kept her uncle's part-playing a secret; it had taken brains as well as courage to do that.

"Well, shall we leave you?" asked Herko-mer.

“Unchaperoned! Indeed!” said Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh. “She’s coming home with me, and then Phil can go through Bergson’s papers and find out the quickest way to get back the money Haig gave to Bergson, and then——”

She impulsively kissed the girl, whose face was a crimson glow now.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

It was after the wedding of Claire Sorel and Philip Waring. The young couple were on their honeymoon. The Carey Haig money had been recovered. Papers found among Bergson's effects had shown that Carey Haig had committed a minor crime in early youth. It had come to the knowledge of Bergson; Haig had done what even stronger men have done, had yielded to blackmail until there was no more to yield save life—honour and fortune having preceded the surrender of life.

And now, with another confirmed bachelor, Malcolm, Herkomer was playing billiards at the club.

"Pretty wedding!" said Malcolm.

"They all are," assented Herkomer. He played a difficult carom—made the point, chalked his cue and eyed the balls. "Poor position," he said. He failed on an easy draw-shot. He sat down.

"Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh's a wonder, isn't

she? What do you suppose she demanded of me to-day? Said some of her woman friends were all swelled up because they had licenses to carry revolvers. She wanted something more than that. Wanted a special officer's commission."

"Give it to her?"

"Lord, yes. Give her anything. . . . Pretty toy; too bad—— Oh, yes, I gave it to her. Bully good sort, too. I'm to dine there to-morrow night. Wants me to meet a girl that——"

"Oh, gosh!" cried Malcolm.

"What's the matter?"

"Why, you poor fish, you're done. You're hooked, gaffed and landed."

Herkomer blushed. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, you'll find out. When Mrs. Willy decides a young man is nice and invites him to meet a girl——"

"Rot!" said Herkomer hotly.

"I know Mrs. Willy," said Malcolm.

"She can't *make* me marry a girl I haven't even met, can she?" demanded Herkomer.

"Of course not. But she can *let* you," grinned Malcolm.

"Rot!" said Herkomer again.

“Best little matchmaker in the world, and now that Philip Waring has married Miss Sorel, Mrs. Willy must be doing something, you know.”

“It won’t be me,” cried Herkomer emphatically and with no great regard for grammar.

“Make a little bet?”

“Certainly.”

“Dinners for six that you’re married in a year.”

“Done,” said Herkomer. “And it’s a shame to take the bet.”

But he didn’t know Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh and the lovely girls that Mrs. Willy knew. Herkomer lost the bet. But he didn’t mind. He always said that Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh was a dear.

THE END





